

IN THE DAYS OF THE COMET

TEN CENTS

NEW YEAR
COSMOPOLITAN





In the Days of the Comet

BY H. G. WELLS

*"The World's Great Age begins now,
The Golden Years return,
The Earth doth like a Snake renew
Her Winter Skin external.
Nature wakes, and Folly and Despair grow
Like Weeds of a Bleaching Down."*

PROLOGUE

THE MAN WHO WROTE IN THE DARK

I saw a gray-haired man, a figure of half age, sitting at a table and writing. It seemed to be on a rock in a tower, very high, so that through the tall window on his left one perceived only distance, a remote horizon of sea, a headland, and that vague haze and glitter in the sunset that many miles away marks a city. All the appointments of the room were orderly and beautiful, and in some subtle quality, in this small difference and that, new to me and strange. They were in no fashion I could name, and the simple costumes the man wore suggested neither peopled nor country. It might, I thought, be the Happy Future or Utopia or the Land of Simple Dreams; an evanescent note of memory, Henry James's pleasure and story of "The Great Good Place" twinkled across my mind and passed and left no light.

The man I saw wrote with a thing like a fountain-pen, a modern touch that prohibited any historical retrospection, and as he finished each sheet, writing in an easy-flowing hand, he added it to a growing pile upon a graceful little table under the window. His last-drawn sheets lay loose, partly covering others, that were slipped together into bundles. Old as he certainly was, he wrote with a steady hand.

Clearly he was unaware of my presence, and I stood waiting until his pen should come to a pause.

I discovered that a concave specimen hung slantingly high over his head, a mere

ment in this caught my attention sharply, and I looked up to see distorted and made fantastic, but bright and beautifully colored, the magnified, reflected, evanescent rendering of a palace, of a terrace, of the vista of a great roadway with many people, people exaggerated, impossible-looking because of the curvature of the mirror, going to and fro. I turned my head quickly, that I might see more clearly through the window behind me, but it was too high for me to survey this nearer scene directly, and after a momentary pause I came back to this distorting mirror again.

But now the writer was leaning back in his chair. He put down his pen and sighed the half-resonant sigh—"Ah! you work, you! how you gently and the well!"—of a man who has been writing to his satisfaction.

"What is this place?" I asked, "and who are you?"

He looked round with the quick movement of surprise.

"What is this place?" I repeated, "and where am I?"

He regarded me steadfastly for a moment from under his wrinkled brows, and then his expression softened to a smile. He pointed to a chair beside the table. "I am writing," he said.

"About this?"

"About the Change."

I sat down. It was a very comfortable chair, and well placed under the light.

"If you would like to read—" he said.

I indicated the manuscript. "Then explain?" I asked.

"That explains," he answered.

He drew a fresh sheet of paper toward him as he looked at me.

I glanced from him about his apartment, and back to the little table. A fac-simile marked very distinctly "*I*" caught my attention, and I took it up. I smiled to his friendly eyes. "Very well," said I, suddenly at my ease, and he nodded and went on writing. And in a mood between confidence and curiosity, I began to read.

This is the story that happy, active-looking old man in that pleasant place had written.

BOOK THE FIRST

CHAPTER THE FIRST—WEST OF THE PLAINES

I

HAVE set myself to write the story of the Great Change as far as it has affected my own life and the lives of one or two people closely connected with me, primarily to please myself.

Long ago, in my cradle, unhappy youth, I conceived the desire of writing a book. To scribble secretly and dream of authorship was one of my chief amusements, and I used with a sympathetic eye every scrap I could get about the world of literature and the lives of literary people. It is something, even amidst this present happiness, to find leisure and opportunity to take up and partially realize those old and hopeless dreams. But that alone, in a world where so much of vivid and increasing interest presents itself to be done even by

an old man, would not, I think, suffice to set me at this desk. I find some such recognition of my past as this will relieve, is becoming necessary to my own severe mental continuity. The passage of years brings a man at last to retrospection; at seventy-two one's youth is far more important than it was at forty. And I am out of touch with my youth. The old life seems so cut off from the new, so alien and so unreasonable, that at times I find it bordering upon the incredible. The days have gone, the buildings and places. I stepped dead the other day in my afternoon's walk across the moor, where once the dismal outposts of Scarborough struggled toward Last, and asked: "Was it here indeed that I crouched among the weeds and refuse and broken crockery, and loaded my revolver, ready for murder? Did ever such a thing happen in my life? Was such a mood, and thought and intention ever possible to me? Rather, but



not some queer nightmare split out of dreamland slipped a pseudo-currency into the records of my vanquished life? There must be many alive still who have the same perplexities. And I think, too, that those who are now growing up to take our places in the great enterprise of mankind, will need many such narratives as mine for even the most partial conception of the old world of shadows that came before our day. It chances that my case is fairly typical of the Change; I was caught midway in a gust of passion and a curious accident put me for a time in the very nucleus of the new order. . . .

My memory takes me back across the interval of fifty years to a little 12x12 room with a back-window open to a starry sky, and instantly there returns to me the characteristic smell of that room, the penetrating odor of an illuminated lamp burning cheap paraffin. Lighting by electricity had then been perfected for fifteen years, but still the larger portion of the world used these lamps. All this first scene will go, in my mind at least, to that olfactory accompaniment. That was the evening smell of the room. By day it had a more subtle aroma, a closeness, a peculiar sort of faint pungency, that I associate—I know not why—with dust.

Let me describe this room to you in detail. It was perhaps eight feet by seven in area, and rather higher than either of these dimensions; the ceiling was of plaster, cracked and bulging in places, grey with the soot of the lamp, and in one place discolored by a system of yellow and olive-green stains caused by the percolation of damp from above. The walls were covered with blue-colored paper upon which had been printed in oblique festoons a crimson shape, something of the nature of a curly ostrich feather or an anthurium-flower, that had in its less faded moments a sort of dingy gaiety. There were several plaster-plastered wobbles in the, caused by Parkard's ineffectual attempts to get nails into the wall, whereby there might hang pictures. One nail had hit between two bricks and got loose, and from this depended, suspended a little loosely by linyed and knotted blind-cord, Parkard's hanging bookshelves, planks painted over with a treacly blue enamel, and further decorated by a fringe of picked American cloth intricately lined by tufts. Below

this was a little table that behaved with a tranchish obstinateness to any load that was thrust beneath it suddenly. It was covered with a cloth whose pattern of red and black had been rendered less inconspicuous by the accident of Parkard's venetian ink-bottle, and on it, almost of the whole, stood and stank the lamp. This lamp, you must understand, was of some whitish translucent substance, that was neither china nor glass, it had a shade of the same substance, a shade that did not protect the eyes of a reader in any measure, and it seemed admirably adapted to bring into palest prominence the fact that after the lamp's tripping, dust and paraffin had been scattered over its exterior with a reckless generosity.

The uneven floor-boards of this apartment were covered with scattered tufts of a chocolate hue, on which a small island of frayed carpet dimly blossomed in the dust and shadow.

There was a very small grate, made of cast-iron in one piece and painted black, and a still smaller niche of a cast-iron frame that enclosed the gray stone of the hearth. No fire was had, only a few scraps of torn paper and the head of a broken core-cob pipe were visible behind the bars, and in the corner, and rather thrust away, was an angular Japanese coal-hue with a damaged hinge.

Parkard's trundle-bed hid its gray sheet, beneath an old patch-work counterpane on one side of the room and veiled his bones and sunlike sediment; and around the two corners of the window were an old washstand and the washboard stand, on which were distributed the simple appliances of his toilet.

This washboard stand had been made of deal by some one with an excess of turnery appliances in a hurry, who had tried to distract attention from the rough execution of his workmanship by an arresting concatenation of knobs and brackets upon the joints and legs. Apparently the piece had then been placed in the hands of some person of infinite leisure equipped with a pot of cohesive paint, varnish, and a set of flexible brushes. This person had then painted the article, then, I fancy, smeared it with varnish, and then sat down to work with the comb to streak and comb the varnish into a weird imitation of the grain of some nightmare timber. The washboard-

man so much had evidently had a prolonged career of violent use; had been chipped, kicked, splintered, punched, stamped, scorched, hammered, decorated, clamped and defiled; had met indeed with almost every possible adventure, except a conflagration or a scrapping, until at last it had come to this high refuge of Parbold's attic to sustain the simple requirements of Parbold's personal cleanliness. It is to be remarked that every drop of water Parbold used had to be carried by an unfortunate servant-girl—the "servy," Parbold called her—up from the basement to the top of the house, and subsequently down again.

A chest, also singularly gnarled and maimed, of two large and two small drawers, held Parbold's reserve of garments, and just on the door clung his two hats and completed this inventory of a "bed-sitting room," as I know it before the Change. But I had forgotten—there was also a chair with a "saggy" seat especially designed and adapted for the defects of its cane seat. I forgot that for the moment, because I was sitting on the chair on the occasion that best begins this story.

I have described Parbold's room with such particularity because it will help you to understand the key in which my earlier chapters are written, but you must not imagine that this singular equipment or the smell of the lamp engaged my attention at that time to the slightest degree. I took all this gray unimportance as it were the most natural and proper setting for existence imaginable. It was the world as I knew it. My mind was entirely occupied then by graver and intenser matters, and it is only now in the distant retrospect that I see these details of environment as being remarkable, as significant, as indeed obviously the outward visible manifestations of the old-world disorder in our hearts.

II

Parbold stood at the open window, open glass in hand, and sought and found, and was uncertain about and lost again, the new comet.

I thought the comet no more than a nuisance then, because I wanted to talk of other matters. But Parbold was full of it. My head was hot, I was feverish with inter-

esting unconsciousness and bitterness, I wanted to open my heart to him—at least, I wanted to relieve my heart by some remote rendering of my troubles—and I gave but little heed to the things he told me.

We were two years much of an age together; Parbold was two and twenty, and eight months older than I. He was—I think his proper definition was "impressing clerk" to a little solicitor in Overcastle, while I was third in the office staff of Rarden's pot-bank in Clayton. We had met first in the "Parliament" of the Young Men's Christian Association of Southwicks; we had found we attended simultaneous classes at Overcastle, he in science and I in shorthand, and had started a practice of walking home together, and so our friendship came into being (Southwicks, Clayton and Overcastle are contiguous towns, I should mention, in the great industrial area of the Midlands). We had shared each other's secret of religious doubt, we had confided to each other a common interest in socialism, he had come twice to supper at my mother's on a Sunday night, and I was free of his apartment. He was then a tall, dark-haired, gawky youth, with a disproportionately development of neck and wrist, and capable of vast enthusiasm; he gave two evenings a week to the evening classes of the organized advanced school in Overcastle, where physiography was his favorite subject; and through this invisible opening of his mind, the wonder of outer space had come to take possession of his soul. He had commissioned an old opera-glass from his uncle who farmed at Lest over the moors, he had bought a cheap paper physiograph and Whitaker's almanac, and for a time day and moonlight were mere blank interruptions to the one satisfactory reality in his life—star-gazing. It was the depth that had seized him, the immensity, and the mysterious possibilities that might float out in that unclouded abyss. With infinite labor, and the help of a very precious article in "The Heaven," a little monthly magazine that catered for those who were under this obsession, he had at last got his opera-glass upon the new visitor to our system from outer space. He gazed in a sort of rapture upon that queer ring little wedge of light among the shining pin-points—and gazed. My troubles had to wait for him.

"Wonderful," he sighed, and then, as

though his first emphasis did not satisfy her—"wonderful!"

He turned to me. "Wouldn't you like to see?"

I had to look, and then I had to leave, how that this scarcely visible creature was to be, was presently to be, one of the largest comets this world has ever seen; how that its course must bring it within at most—so many score of millions of miles from the earth (a mere step, Parkard seemed to think that); how that the spectroscope was already sounding its chemical secrets, perplexed by an unprecedented band of the green; how it was even now being photographed in the very act of vanishing—in an unusual direction—a downward fall (which, presently it wound up again); and all the while, in a sort of reverie, I was thinking, first of Nettie Stuart and the letter she had just written me, and then of old Razend's detectable face as I had seen it that afternoon. Now I planned answers to Nettie, and new belated reports to my employer, and then again "Nettie" was blazing all across the background of my thoughts.

Nettie Stuart was daughter of the head gardener of the rich Mr. Varnell's widow, and she and I had missed and become sweethearts before we were eighteen years old. My mother and her were second cousins and old schoolfellow, and though my mother had been widowed unusually by a train accident and had been reduced to letting lodgings (she was the Clayton curate's landlady), a fortune measured much lower than that of Mrs. Stuart, a kindly custom of occasional visits to the gardener's cottage at Chestchill Towers still kept the friends in touch. Commonly I went with her. And I remember it was in the dusk of one bright evening in July, one of those long golden evenings which do not so much give way to night as admit at last upon courtesy, the moon and a cluster of stars, that Nettie and I, at the pond of goldfish where the new bordered willow-covered, made our shy beginning, now. I remember still—something will always stir in me at that memory—the tremulous emotion of that adventure. Nettie was dressed in white, her hair was all in waves of soft darkness from above her dark, shining eyes, and there was a little necklace of pearls about her white modeled neck, and a little coin of gold that

nestled in her throat. I kissed her half-shut lips, and for those years of my life thereafter—say! I almost think for all the rest of her life and mine—I could have died for her sake.

You must understand—and every year it becomes increasingly difficult to understand—how entirely different the world was then from what it is now. It was a dark world; it was full of preventable disaster, preventable disease, and preventable pain, of hardness, of a savage and varied jealousy and stupid unrepresented cruelty, but yet, it may be even by virtue of the general darkness, there were moments of a rare and evanescent beauty that seem no longer possible to my experience. The Great Change has come; forever, happiness and beauty are our atmosphere, there is peace on earth and good will to all men, none would dare to dream of returning to the sorrows of the former time, and yet that misery was patient, ever and again its gray curtain was studded through and through, by joys of an intensity, by perceptions of a keenness, that it seems to me are now altogether gone out of life. Is it the Change, I wonder, that has robbed life of its extremes, or is it perhaps only this, that youth has left me—even the strength of the middle years leaves me now—and takes its despoils and raptures, leaving me judgment, perhaps, sympathy, remorse?

I cannot tell. One would need to be young now, and to have been young then as well, to divine that impossible problem.

Perhaps a cool observer even in the old days would have found little beauty in our greeting. I have our two photographs at hand in this bureau as I write, and they show a gayly youth in ill-fitting, ready-made clothing, and Nettie—Indeed, Nettie is badly dressed, and her attitude is more than a little stiff, but I can see her through the picture, and her living brightness, and something of that mystery of charm she had for me, come back again to my mind.

The reality of beauty yields itself to no words. I wish that I had the power and could draw in my margin something that escape description. There was a sort of glow in her eyes. There was something a matter of the emitted difference, about her upper lip, so that her mouth closed

mently and looks very sweetly to a smile. That grave, sweet smile!

After we had kissed and decided not to tell our parents for a while of the irreversible choice we had made, the time came for us to part, shyly and before others, and my mother and I went off huck across the moorland park—the bracken-thickets rustling with startled deer—to the railway-station at Chelmsford and so to our dingy basement in Clapton, and I saw no more of Nettie—except that I saw her in my thoughts—for nearly a year. But at our next meeting it was decided we must correspond, and this we did with much elaboration of secrecy, for Nettie would have no one at home, not even her only sister, know of her attachment. So I had to send my precious documents sealed and under cover by way of a confidential school-fellow of hers who lived near London.

Our correspondence began our estrangement, because for the first time we came into more than sentence contact and our minds sought expression.

Now you must understand that the world of thought in those days was in the steepest condition; it was choked with obsolete, inadequate formulae, it was tortured to a miserable degree with secondary contraries and adaptations, suppressions, conventions and subterfuges. Base insincerity fouled the truth on any man's lips. I was brought up by my mother in a quaint, old-fashioned, narrow faith in certain religious formulas, certain rules of conduct, certain conceptions of social and political order, that had no more relevance to the realities and needs of everyday contemporary life than if they were clean linen that had been put away with lavender in a drawer. Indeed, her religion did actually smell of lavender; on Sundays she put away all the things of reality, the garments and even the furnishings of everyday, hid her hands, that were painted and sometimes daubed with scribbling, in carefully moulded black gloves, assumed her old black silk dress and bonnet, and took me, unnaturally clean and even Alice, to church. There we sang and bowed and heard sacrosanct prayers and joined in a nervous response, and rose with a congregational sigh, refreshed and relieved, when the doxology with its opening "Now to God the Father, God the Son," bowed out the tame, brief sermon. There was a bell an

awful noise of my mother's, a well-known bell of curly flames that had once been very terrible; we were expected to believe that man of our poor unhappy world was to stand for its middle and moulds here by suffering agonistic torments forever after, world without end. Amen. But indeed these curly flames looked rather jolly. The whole thing had been well-loved and faded into a gentle memory long before my time; if it had crack-tenor even in my childhood, I have forgotten that; it was not so terrible as the Giant who was killed by the Beanstalk; and I see it all now as a setting for my poor old mother's woe and pity here, and almost lovingly as a part of her. And Mr. Gibbiss, our plump little lodger, strangely transformed in his viscountess and lifting his voice manfully to the quality of those Elizabethan prayers, seemed, I think, to give her a special and peculiar interest with God. She radiated her own tremulous goodness upon him, and demanded His love all the implications of unaffected theologia; she was in truth, had I but perceived it, the effaced source to all the world have taught me.

Mr. Gibbiss, you see, did sometimes, as the phrase went, "take notice" of me. He had induced me to go on reading after I left school; and with the best intentions in the world, and to anticipate the poison of the times, he had lent me Burke's "Scorpion Answered," and drawn my attention to the library of the Institute in Clapton.

The excellent Burke was a great shock to me; it seemed clear from his answers to the skeptic that the case for doctrinal orthodoxy and all that faded and by no means awful heresies, which I had hitherto accepted as I accepted the sun, was an extremely poor one, and in humbler home that time, the first book I got from the Institute happened to be an American edition of the collected works of Shelley, his great prose as well as his atmospheric verse. I was soon ripe for atheist disbelief. And at the Young Men's Christian Association I gradually made the acquaintance of Pritchard, who told me under promise of the most sisterly secrecy that he was "a socialist out and out." He lent me several copies of a periodical with the quaint title of "The Clarion," which was just taking up a crusade against the sceptical

religion. The adolescent years of any truly intelligent youth lie open, and will always be healthily open, to the contagion of philosophical doubts, of storms and new ideas, and I will confess I had the fever of that phase badly. Doubt, I say, but it was not so much doubt—which is a complex thing—an startled, emphatic denial. "Here I believed this!" And I was also, you must remember, just commencing love-letters to Nellie.

We live now in these days when the Great Change has been in most things accomplished, in a time when everyone is being educated to a sort of intellectual gentleness, a gentleness that abhors nothing from our vigor, and it is hard to understand the timid and staggering manner in which my generation of common young men did its thinking. To think at all about certain questions was an act of rebellion that set one oscillating between the furrow and the plowshare. People began to find Shelley—for all his melody—cooky and all conditioned now, because his Anarchs have vanished, yet there was a time when novel thought had to go to that time of breaking glass. It becomes a little difficult to imagine the yeasty state of mind, the disposition to shout and say "Yah!" at constituted authority, to sustain a persistent note of provocation, such as we saw youngsters displayed. I began to read with avidity such writings as Carlyle, Browning and Hesse have left for the plenty of posterity, and not only to read and admire but to imitate. My letters to Nellie, after one or two genuinely intended displays of perverted tenderness, broke out toward blasphemy, mockery and the essence of orgiastic and startling expression. No doubt they puzzled her extremely.

I retain the keenest sympathy, and something inexplicably near to envy, for my own departed youth, but I should find it difficult to maintain my case against anyone who would condemn me altogether as having been a very silly, posturing, exceptional babbitchboy indeed, and spite like my faded photograph. And when I try to recall what exactly must have been the quality and tenor of my more sustained efforts to write reasonably to my sweet-heart, I confess I shiver. . . . Yet I wish they were not all destroyed.

Her letters to me were simple enough, written in a roundish, unformed hand, and

happily phrased. Her first two or three showed a shy pleasure in the use of the word "dear"; and I remember being first puzzled and then, when I understood, delighted, because she had written "Willie ankles" under my name. "Albert," I gathered, meant "darling." But when the evidence of my fermentation began, her answers were less happy.

I will not weary you with the story of how we quarreled in our silly youthfulness, and how I went the next Sunday, all uninvited, to Cheltenham and made it worse, and how afterward I wrote a letter that she thought was "lovely" and intended the reverse. Nor will I tell of all our subsequent fluctuations of misunderstanding. Always I was the offender and the final penitent, until this last trouble that was now beginning; and in between we had some tender new moments and I loved her very greatly. There was this misfortune in the business, that in the darkness and alone I thought with great intensity of her, of her eyes, of her mouth, of her sweet, delightful presence, but when I sat down to write I thought of Shelley and Burns and myself and other such irrelevant matters. When one is in love in the fermenting way, it is harder to make love than it is when one does not love at all. And as for Nellie, she loved, I know, not me, but those gentle mysteries. It was not my voice should move her dreams to passion. . . . So our letters continued to jar. Then suddenly she wrote me one doubting whether she could ever care for anyone who was a socialist and did not believe in the church; and then, had open it, came another note with unexpected novelties of phrasing. She thought we were not suited to each other; we differed so in tastes and ideas; she had long thought of releasing me from our engagement. In fact, though I really did not apprehend it fully at the first shock, I was dismasted. Her letter had reached me when I came home after old Rawdon's most too-civil refusal to raise my wages. On this particular evening of which I write, therefore, I was in a state of feverish adjustment to two new and amazing, two really overwhelming, facts, that I was indispensable neither to Nellie nor at Rawdon's. And to talk of cancer!

Where did I stand?

I had grown so accustomed to think of



THE MAN WHO WAITED IN THE TOWER.

Neenie as inexplicably gone—the whole tradition of "true love" pointed me to that—that for her to break about with these private small phrases toward abandonment, after we had talked and whispered and come so close in the little adventures of familiarity of the young, shocked me profoundly. If I'd known didn't feel me indispensable, either. I felt I was suddenly repudiated by the universe and threatened with effacement, that in some positive and emphatic way I must at once assert myself.

Should I ring up Rawdon's place at once, and then, in some *extraordinarily* quiet manner, make the fortune of Froebel's adjoint and closely competing potbank?

The first part of that programme, at any rate, would be easy of accomplishment—to go to Rawdon and say, "You will hear from me again—but for the rest, Froebel might tell me. That, however, was a secondary issue. The predominant affair was with Neenie. I found my mind thick-set with flying fragments of rhetoric that might be of service to the letter I would write her. Scorn, irony, tenderness—what was it to be?

"Bother!" said Parkrod suddenly.

"What?" said I.

"They're firing up at Bladder's cross-works, and the smoke comes right across my bit of sky."

The interruption came just as I was ripe to discharge my thoughts upon her.

"Parkrod," said I, "very likely I shall have to leave off this. Old Rawdon won't give me a rise in my wages, and after having asked I don't think I can stand going on upon the old terms any more. See? So I may have to clear out of Clayton for good and all."

III

That made Parkrod put down the opera glass and look at me.

"It's a bad time to change jobs now," he said, after a little pause.

Parkrod had said as much, in a less agreeable tone.

But with Parkrod I felt always a disposition to the heroic note. "I'm tired," I said, "of human crudity for other men. One may as well shave one's body out of a plow as shave one's soul in one"

"I don't know about that altogether," began Parkrod, sheepishly.

And with that we began one of our interminable conversations, one of those long, winding, intensely generalized, diffusely personal talks that will be dear to the hearts of intelligent youths until the world comes to an end.

It would be an incredible task of memory for me now to recall all that meandering haze of talk; indeed, I recall scarcely any of it, though its circumstances and atmosphere stand out, a sharp, clear picture in my mind. I panted after my manner, and behaved very foolishly, no doubt, wounded, smarting egotist, and Parkrod played his part of the philosopher preoccupied with the deeps.

We were presently abroad, walking through the warm summer's night and talking all the more freely for that. But one thing that I and I can remember, "I wish at times," said I, with a gesture at the heavens, "that comet of poes or some such thing would indeed strike this world and wipe us all away—others, was, remains, loves, jealousies, and all the weightlessness of life."

"Ah!" said Parkrod, and the thought seemed to hang about him.

"It could only add to the misery of life," he said irrelevantly, when presently I began discoursing of other things.

"What would?"

"Collision with a comet. It would only throw things back. It would only make what was left of life more misery than it is at present."

"But why should anything be left of life?" said I.

That was our walk, you know, and meanwhile we walked together up the narrow street outside his lodgings, up the stairway and the lanes toward Clayton Crest and the highroad.

We crossed a longer street, up which a dozen steam-trams, roasting smoke and sparks, made their dangerous way, and down which one saw the prizey brilliancy of shop-fronts and the sulphur haze of bakers dripping the into the night. A busy movement of people passed along that road, and we heard the voice of an itinerant preacher from a dark place between the houses. You cannot see these things as I can see them, nor can you figure—unless you know the pictures that great artist Hyde



THIS WAS THE SCENE OF MANY A TALK WE TWO HAD HELD TOGETHER

has left the world—the effect of the great hoarding by which we passed, lit below by a gaslight and towering up to a sudden sharp black edge against the pallid sky.

These hoardings! They were the brightest-colored things in all that vanished world. Upon them, in successive layers of paste and paper, all the rough enterprises of that time joined in chromatic discord—pill-venders and preachers, theaters and charities, mercurial soaps and astonishing pickles, typewriting machines and sewing machines, mingled in a sort of visualized clatter. And passing that there was a gaudy line of circles, a line without a light, that used its many possible to burnish a star or so from the sky. We splashed along, unheeding as we talked. Then across the alberments, a wilderness of cabbages and evill-looking sheds, past a great abandoned factory, and so to the highroad. The highroad ascended in a curve past a few dwellings and a tea-house or so, and round until all the valley in which four industrial towns lay crowded and confused was overlooked.

I will admit that with the twilight there came a spell of wistful magnificence over all that land, and hooded us until dawn. The horrible massness of its details was veiled—the batches that were houses, the bristling multifolds of chimneys, the ugly patches of swirling vegetation amidst the rankish flocks of barrel-staves and wire. The rusty scars that frayed the opposite ridge where the iron ore was taken, and the barren remnants of slag from the blast-furnaces, were veiled; the soot and hoaking smoke and dust from foundry, pot-hank and furnace were transfigured and assimilated by the night. The first silent atmosphere that was a gray oppression through the day became at sundown a mystery of deep translucent colors, of blues and purples, of somber and vivid reds, of strong, bright clearnesses of green and yellow against the darkling sky. Each apart furnace, when its research sun had gone, crowned itself with flames; the dark, under-heaps began to glow with gas-burner fires, and each pot-hank also spewed rebellions in a volant concert of light. The empire of the day broke into a thousand fractal horizons of burning coal. The minor streets across the valley picked themselves out with gas lamps of short yellow,

that brightened and mingled at all the principal squares and crossings with the greenish pallor of incandescence; marble and the high, cold glare of the electric arc. The trairing railways blazed bright signal-bones over their embankments, and signal stars of red and green in rectangular constellations. The stars became very suspect breasting a lurid fire.

Moreover, high overhead, like things put out of reach and out forgotten, Parbold had rediscovered a realm that was ruled by neither sun nor furnace—the universe of stars.

This was the scene of many a talk we two had held together. And if in the daytime we went right over the crest and looked westward, there was farmland, there were parks and great manors, the spire of a distant cathedral, and sometimes, when the weather was clear riding, the crests of remote mountains lying clearly in the sky. Beyond the range of sight, indeed, sat beyond, there was Checkleoff; I felt it there always, and in the darkness more than I did by day. Checkleoff and Nettle!

And to us two youngsters, as we walked along the cinder-path beside the rutted road and argued out our perplexities, it seemed that this ridge gave an comprehensively a view of our whole world.

There, on the one hand, in a crowded darkness, about the ugly factories and work-places, the workers huddled together, ill-clad, ill-nourished, ill-taught, bodily and expensively reared at every occasion in the uncertain eyes of their masters; huddled from day to day, the chapels and churches and public houses rearing up amidst their wretched homes like sepulchres amidst a general corruption, and on the other hand, in space, freedom and plenty scarce boasting the few cottages, as overcrowded as picturesque, in which the laborers dwelt, lived the landlords and the masters who owned the pot-hank and forge and farm and manor. Far away, distant, beautiful, unknown, from out of a little cluster of second-hand bookshops, eccentric residents, and the rats and verminoids of a decaying marketplace, the cathedral of Leicester poised a beautiful unemphatic spire to vague incredulous skies. So it seemed to us the whole world was planted in those youthful first impressions.

(To be continued)



In the Days of the Comet

BY H. G. WELLS

BOOK THE FIRST: THE COMET

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH—DUST IN THE MEADOWS (CONTINUED)

PARKE—The narrative tells the story of the Great Change. When a young man he was a clerk in a hardware in Clayton. He has been engaged to marry Nelly Smart, but the girl has broken with him on account of his avocation and religious doubts. Relaxed an increase of salary, he decides to give up his position. He takes his practice to his friend Parked—a man of his own age and views. Parked has a book for review, especially interesting, and is deeply interested in a comet which threatens to approach the earth's orbit. The two friends climb a ridge whence they may view the sky, the town before them and the country beyond. Here they discuss the conditions under which they live.

IV

IT was everything simply, as a young man will. We had our angry, confident soldiers, and whenever would offend them was a division of the robbers. It was a clear case of robbery; we held—yielded so there in those great houses linked the Landlord and the Accidental Capitalist, with his accursed Lawyer, with his-ghost the Priest, and as others were all the victims of their deliberate villainies. No doubt they wrangled and chattered over their many wings, amidst their

drizzling, wickedly dressed women, and plotted further grinding for the slaves of the poor. And amidst all the snarls on the other hand, amidst brutalities, ignorance and drunkenness, suffered wretchedly their blameless victim, the Working Man. And we, almost at the first glance, had found all this out; it had merely to be asserted now with sufficient rhetoric and oratory to change the face of the whole world. The Working Man would arise—in the form of a Labor Party, and with young men like Parked and myself to represent him—and come to his own, and then—?

Then the robbers would get it hot, and



Photo by Christopher

THE MAN IS CLAD IN THE CLASSICAL WORKER'S CLOTHES THE WORKERS IN CHENGDU USE IN THE HOUSE



Courtesy of the National Archives

EVACUATION WAS ORDERED AND THE BAGGAGE REMAINED AS THE TIDE WENT DOWN

everything would be extremely satisfactory.

Unless my memory plays me strange tricks, this does no injustice to the creed of thought and action that Farhad and I held as the final result of human wisdom. We believed it with heat, and rejected with heat, the most obvious qualification of its truthfulness. At these, in our great talks, we were full of ready hope for the near triumph of our doctrine; more often, our mood was hot resentment at the wickedness and stupidity that delayed so plain and simple a reconstruction of the order of the world. Then we grew indignant, and thought of barricades and righteous violence. I was very bitter, I know, upon the night of which I am now particularly telling, and the only dare upon the hydra of Capitalism and Monopoly that I could see at all clearly, until exactly as old Marlowe had said when he refused to give me more than a paltry twenty shillings a week.

I wanted intensely to save my self-respect by some revenge upon him, and I felt that if that could be done by slaying the hydra, I might drag its carcass to the feet of Nemesis and settle my other trouble as well. "What do you think of me now, Nemesis?"

That, at any rate, comes near enough to the quality of my thinking then, for you to imagine how I gesticulated and argued to Farhad that night. You figure me as an ugly black figure, encompasses in the outline, set in the midst of that dazzling sight of flaring industrialism, and my little voice with a rhetorical swing pronouncing, discoursing.

You will consider those outlines of my youth poor, silly, violent stuff; particularly if you are of the younger generation born since the Change, you will be of that opinion. Nowadays when the whole world thinks clearly, thinks with deliberation, polished certainties, you find it impossible to imagine how any other thinking could have been possible. Let me tell you, then, how you can bring yourself to something like the condition of our former state. In the first place, you must get yourself out of health by useless drinking and eating, and out of condition by neglecting your exercise; then you must contrive to be worried very much and much; very anxious and uncomfortable, and then you must make

very hard for four or five days and for long hours every day at something too pretty to be interesting, too complex to be mechanical, and without any personal significance to you whatever. This done, go straightforward into a room that is not ventilated at all and that is already full of foul air, and there set yourself to think out some very complicated problem. In a very little while you will find yourself in a state of intellectual湍流, annoyed, impatient, snatching at the obvious, presently closing and rejecting conclusions haphazard. Try to play chess under such conditions, and you will play shoddy and lose poor longer. Try to do anything that taxes brain or muscle, and you will fail.

Now, the whole world before the Change was as sick and desirous as that; it was worried and oppressed and perplexed by problems that would not get solved simply, that stoned and created solutions, it was in an atmosphere that had corrupted and thickened past breaking; there was no thorough, cool thinking in the world at all. There was nothing in the mind of the world anywhere but half-truths, hasty assumptions, hallucinations and emotion. Nothing.

I know it seems incredible, and that already some of the younger men are beginning to doubt the greatness of the Change our world has undergone, but read the newspapers of that time. Every age becomes antiquated and a little concealed in our minds as it recedes into the past. It is the part of those who, like myself, have stories of that time to tell, to supply, by a scrupulous spiritual realism, some antidote to that gloom.

V

Always with Farhad I was chief talker. I can look back upon myself with, I believe, an almost perfect detachment. Things have so changed that, indeed, now I am another being, with scarcely anything in common with that beautiful, foolish younger whose troubles I recall. I am less vulgarly theatrical, egotistical, indolent indeed, I do not like now with that intrinsically material sympathy that is the trait of increased infirmity. Because he was expert, I may be able to feel and write understandingly about matters that

will put him out of sympathy with nearly every reader, but why should I palliate or defend his quality?

Always, I say, I did the talking, and it would have caused me beyond measure if anyone had told me that mine was not the greater intelligence in these woody excusations. Parkard was a quiet youth, and still and restrained in all things, while I had that impulsive gift for young men and demagogues, the gift of copious expression. Parkard I diagnosed in my secret hours as a trifling child. He posed as preposterously quiet, I thought, and was obscured by the congenital notion of "scientific caution." I did not remark that while my hands were chiefly used for gesturing or holding a pen, Parkard's hands could do all sorts of things, and I did not think, therefore, that there must run from those fingers to something in his brain. Nor, though I bragged perpetually of my share, of my literature, of my indispensable share in Rawdon's business, did Parkard lay stress on the census and calculate by "rung and" in the organized science school. Parkard is a famous man now, a great figure in a great firm; his work upon intersecting radiations has broadened the intellectual horizon of mankind forever, and I, who am at best a brever of intellectual word, a drainer of living water, can smile, and he can smile, to think how I patronized and passed and jibbered over him in the darkness of those early days.

That night I was shrewd and discreet. Leopold measured Rawdon was, of course, the hub upon which I went round—Rawdon, and the Rawdon-esque employees, and the injection of "wage-slavery" and all the immediate conditions of that industrial blood alloy up which it seemed our lives were thrust. But ever and again I glanced at other things. Nostic ran always there in the background of my mind, regarding me enigmatically. It was part of my pose to Parkard that I had a romantic love affair somewhere over beyond the sphere of our intercourse, and that now gave a Byronic resonance to many of the non-sentimental things I professed for his a-stroke man.

I will not weary you with the detailed account of the life of a foolish youth who was also disinterested and unhappy, and whose voice was bated by the humiliations that smirched in his eyes. Indeed, now, in

many particulars, I cannot disentangle this narrative of which I tell from many of the things I may have said in other talks to Parkard. For example, I forgot if it was then or before or afterward that, as it were by accident, I let out what might be taken as an admission that I was addicted to drugs.

"You shouldn't do that," said Parkard suddenly. "It won't do to poison your brains with that."

My brains, my eloquence, were to be very important assets to our party in the coming resolution . . .

But one thing does clearly belong to this particular conversation. I am credulous. When I started out, it was quite settled in the back of my mind that I must not leave Rawdon's. I simply wanted to shake my employer to Parkard. But I talked myself quite out of touch with all the cogent reasons there were for sticking to my place, and I got home that night irresolute—committed to a splinter—not to say a ricket—policy with my employer.

"I can't stand Rawdon's much longer," I said to Parkard by way of a flourish.

"There's hard times coming," said Parkard.

"Next winter?"

"Yes. The Americans have been encroaching, and they mean to clamp. The iron trade is going to have convulsions."

"I don't care. Perhaps we are stupid."

"With a corner in horses? No. You heard—"

"What have you heard?"

"Office-secrets. But it's no secret there's trouble coming to porters. There's been borrowing and speculation. The masters don't stick to one business as they used to do. I can tell that much. Half the valley may be 'playing' before two months are out." Parkard deferred himself of this unusually long speech in his most pity and weighty manner.

"'Playing'" was our local euphemism for a time when there was no work and no money for a man, a time of stagnation and decay, hunger looking day after day. Such interludes seemed in those days a necessary consequence of industrial organization.

"You'll better stick to Rawdon's," said Parkard.

"Ugh!" said I, after a noble dispute.

"There'll be trouble," said Parkard.

"Who comes?" said I. "Let there be trouble—the more the better. The masters has got to end, sooner or later. These capitalists with their speculations and corners and trusts make things go from bad to worse. Why should I cover in Rawdon's affair, like a frightened dog, while hunger stalks the streets? Hunger is the master revolutionary. When he comes, we ought to turn out and subdue him. I'm going to do so now."

"That's all very well," began Parkard.

"I'm tired of it," I said. "I want to come to grips with all these Rawdons. I think perhaps if I was hungry and savage I could talk to hungry men—"

"There's your mother," said Parkard in his slow, judicial way.

That was a difficulty.

I got over it by a rhetorical turn. "Why should one sacrifice the future of the world—why should one even sacrifice one's own future—because one's mother is totally dictatit of imaginariness?"

VI

It was late when I parted from Parkard and came back to my own home.

Our house stood in a highly respectable little square near the Clayton parish church. Mr. Gabbidon, the master-of-all-work, lodged an out-ground door, and upstairs there was an old lady, Miss Hobgood, who painted flowers on china, and maintained her blind sister in an adjacent room; my mother and I lived in the basement and slept in the attic. The front of the house was walled by a Virginia creeper that defied the Clayton air and clustered in velvety dependent masses over the wooden porch.

As I came up the steps, I had a glipse of Mr. Gabbidon working over his negatives by candlelight in his room. It was the chief delight of his little life to spend his holiday abroad, in the company of a queer little snap-shot camera, and to return with a great multitude of foggy and distorted negatives that he had made in beautiful and interesting places. He would spend his evenings the year through in printing from them in order to inflict copies upon his unthirsting friends. There was a long interval of his work in the Clayton National School, for example, inscribed in

old English lettering, "Indian Travel Pictures by the Rev. E. B. Gabbidon." For this, it seemed, he lived and traveled and had his being. It was his only real joy. By his shaded light I could see his sharp little nose, his little pale eyes behind his glasses, his mouth pinched up with the an-
noyance of his employment.

"Hunting him," I muttered, for was not he also part of the system, part of the scheme of robbery that made wage-slaves of Parkard and me?—though his share in the proceeds were certainly small.

"Hunting him," said I, standing in the darkness, outside even his faint glow of travelled oil-paper.

My mother let me in.

She looked at me, sadly, because she knew there was something wrong and that it was no use for her to ask what.

"Good night, mammy," said I, and kissed her a little roughly, and I went and took my candle and went off at once up the staircase to bed—not looking back at her.

"I've kept some supper for you, dear."

"Don't want any supper."

"But, dear—"

"Good night, mother," and I went up and slammed my door upon her, blew out my candle and lay down at once upon my bed, and lay there a long time before I got up to undress.

There were times when that dumb beseeching of my mother's heart irritated me unmercifully. I did so that night. I felt I had to struggle against it, that I could not exist if I gave way to its pleading, and it hurt me and divided me to resist it almost beyond endurance. It was close to me that I had to think out for myself religious problems, social problems, questions of conduct, questions of expediency; that her poor dear simple beliefs could not help me at all—and she did not understand! Here was the accepted religion, her only social ideas were blind submittance to the accepted order, to love, to doctors, clergymen, lawyers, masters and all respectable persons in authority over us, and with her, to believe was to live. She knew from a thousand little signs—though still at times I went to church with her—that I was passing out of touch of all these things that ruled her life, into some terrible unknown. Foul things, I said she could infer such changeable conclusions as I made. She felt my socialism, felt my spirit in revolt

against the accepted order, felt the impatient restlessness that filled me with bitterness against all she held sacred. Yet, you know, it was not her dear gods she sought to defend so much as me! She seemed always to be waiting to say to me: "Dear, I know it's hard—but revolt is harder. Don't make me do it, dear—don't! Don't do anything to offend it. I'm sure it will hurt you if you do—it will hurt you if you do."

She had been drawn into submission, as so many women of that time had been, by the sheer brutality of the accepted thing. The existing order dominated her into a world of abject submission. It had been her, aged her, pulled her of strength so that at fifty-five she peered through cheap spectacles at my face and saw it only dimly, filled her with a babel of anxiety, made her hands——. The poor dear hands! Not in the whole world now could you find a woman with hands to grasp, to needle, to mangle, to pull, to clapped and combed, to avidly thumbed. . . . At any rate, there is this I can say for my self, that my bitterness against the world and fortune was for her sake as well as for my own.

Yet that night I pushed by her harshly. I answered her curtly, and left her comical and perplexed in the passage, and slammed my door upon her.

And for a long time I lay raging at the harshship and evil of life, at the concept of Random and the treacherousness of Nettie's brain, at my weakness and impotency, at the things I found revolting and the things I could not mind. Over and over went my poor little brain, tried out and unable to stop on my tressail of troubles. Nettie. Random. My mother. Gabbrias. Nettie . . .

Suddenly I came upon emotional exhaustion. Some clock was striking midnight. After all, I was young; I had these quick tracassions. I remember quite distinctly that I stood up abruptly, undressed very quickly in the dark, and had barely touched my pillow again before I was asleep.

But here my mother slept that night I do not know.

Oddly enough, I do not blame myself for behaving like this to my mother, though

my conscience blames me severely for my arrogance to Parkard. I regret my behavior to my mother before the days of Change. It is a sore among my memories that will always be a little painful to the end of my days, but I do not see how something of the sort was to be escaped under those former conditions. In that time of middle and obscurity, people were overtaken by needs and toil and loss sometimes before they had the chance of even a year or so of clear thinking, they settled down to an intense and unceasing application to some partial but immediate duty, and the growth of thought ceased in them. They set and hardened into narrow ways. Few women remained capable of a new idea after five-and-twenty, few more after thirty-one or two. Discontent with the thing that existed was regarded as personal, it was certainly an annoyance; and the only protest against it, the only effort against that universal tendency in all human creatures to thicken and clog, to work loosely and haphazard, to rust and weaken toward catastrophes, came from the young, the crude, unacculturated young. That seemed in those days to thoughtful men the harsh law of our being, rather than we must submit to our elders and be stifled, or we must disregard them, disobey them, thrust them aside and make our little step of progress before we, too, could find and become obstructive in our turn.

My pushing past my mother, my unspouseable departure to my own silent meditation, was, I now perceive, a figure of the whole hard relationship between parents and sons in those days. There appeared no other way; that perpetually recurring tragedy was, it seemed, part of the very nature of the progress of the world. We did not think then that mankind might grow up without growing rigid, or children know their parents and still think for themselves. We were angry and hasty because we suffered in darkness, in a poisoned and vitiated air. That deliberate suspicion of the intelligence which is now the unusual quality, that vigor with consideration, that judgment with confident enterprise, which shone through all our world, were things disintegrated and unknown in the corrupting atmosphere of our former state.

(In the first fascicle ended. I put it aside and looked for the second.

"Well?" said the man who wrote.

"This is fiction?"

"It's my story."

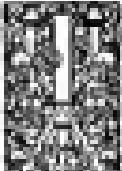
"But you? Amidst this beauty—You are not the ill-conditioned, squabbled-kind of whom I have been reading?"

He smiled. "There interests a certain Change," he said. "Have I not listed as that?"

I hesitated upon a question, then saw the sword handle at hand and picked it up:

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED—SCUTTLE

I


CANNOT now remember, the story resumed, what interval separated that evening on which Parkold first showed me the comet—I think I only pretended to see it then—and the Sunday afternoon I spent at Checkhill.

Between the two there was time enough for me to give notice and leave Ransdon's, to seek for some other situation very strenuously in vain, to think and say many bad and vulgar things to my mother and to Parkold, and to pass through some phases of very profound worthlessness. There must have been a passionate correspondence with Nesta, but all the frost and fury of that has faded now out of my memory. All I have clear now is that I wrote one magnificient farewell to her, casting her off forever, and getting in reply a poor little note to say that even if there was to be an end to everything, that was no excuse for writing such things as I had done; and then, I think, I wrote again in a way I considered satisfied. To this she did not reply. That interval was at least three weeks, and probably four, because the comet which had been on the first occasion only a dubious speck in the sky, certainly visible only when it was magnified, was now a great white presence, brighter than Jupiter, and casting a shadow on its own account. It was now actively present in the world of human thought, everyone was talking about it, everyone was looking for its waning splendor as the sun went down, the papers, the associations, the handbills, the handbills, advised it.

Yes, the comet was already dominant before I went over to make everything clear to Nesta. And Parkold had spent two hundred pounds in buying himself a

spectroscope, so that he could see for himself, night after night, that mysterious, that stimulating line—the unknown line in the green. How many times, I wonder, did I look at the smudgy, quivering symbol of the unknown things that were rushing upon us out of the infinite void, before I rebelled? Big as life I could stand it no longer, and I reproached Parkold very bitterly for wasting his time in an "astronomical digression."

"Harr," said I, "we're at the verge of the biggest kickout in the history of this country-side, here's chisme and hunger coming, here's all the capitalist, competitive system like a sword unsheathed, and you spend your time gaping at that damned silly streak of nothing in the sky?"

Parkold stared at me. "Yes, I do," he said, slowly, as though it was a new idea. "Don't I? . . . I wonder why."

"I want to start meetings of an evening on Howden's Waste."

"You think they'd listen?"

"They'll listen last enough now."

"They didn't before," said Parkold, looking at his great instrument.

"There was a demonstration of unemployed at Swartangles on Sunday. They got to stone-throwing."

Parkold said nothing for a little while, and I said several things. He seemed to be considering something.

"But, after all," he said at last, with an unshaken movement toward his spectroscope, "that does signify something."

"The comet?"

"Yes."

"What can it signify? You don't want me to believe in astrology. What does it matter what passes in the heavens—when even we start in on earth?"

"It's—it's science."

"Science! What we want now is socialism—not science!"

He still seemed reluctant to give up his concept.

"Socialism's all right," he said, "but if that thing up there were to hit the earth, it might matter."

"Nothing matters but human beings."

"Suppose it killed them all."

"Oh!" said I, "that's not."

"I wonder," said Parkard, drearily divested in his appearance.

He looked at the comet. He seemed on the verge of repeating his growing information about the success of the paths of earth and comet, and all that might ensue from that. So I cut in with something I had got out of a new forgery, written called *Ruskin*, a volume of beautiful language and interesting suggestions, who conversed very gaily with eloquent, erudite young men in those days. Something it was about the importance of science and the supreme importance of life. Parkard stood leaning, half turned toward the sky, with the tips of his fingers on his spectacles. He seemed to wait to a sudden decision.

"No. I don't agree with you, Lord-ford," he said. "You don't understand about science."

Parkard rarely argued with that blarney of opposition. I was so used to entire possession of our talk that his brief contradiction struck me like a blow. "Don't agree with me?" I repeated.

"No," said Parkard.

"But here's."

"I believe science is of more importance than socialism," he said. "Socialism's a theory. Science—science is something more."

And that was really all he seemed to be able to say.

We embarked upon one of those queer arguments dilatory young men used always to find so healing. Science or socialism? It was, of course, like arguing which is right, left-handisms or a taste for onions—it was an altogether impossible opposition. But the range of my rhetoric enabled me at last to outwit Parkard, and his mere repudiation of my dictation sufficed to exasperate me, and we ended in the key of a positive quarrel. "Oh, very well!" said I. "So long as I know where we are!"

I slammed his door as though I thun-

dered his house, and went raging down the street, but I felt he was already back at the window watching his blessed line in the green bushes I got round the corner.

I had to walk for an hour or so before I was cool enough to go home.

And it was Parkard had first introduced me to socialism!

Recount!

The most extraordinary things used to run through my head in those wild days. I will confess that my mind ran persistently that evening upon revolutions after the best French pattern, and I set on a committee of safety and tried hard to help. Parkard was there, among the prisoners, backsliders, traitors, were his lot of the crew of his way. His hands were tied behind his back ready for the chastisement through the open door one heard the voice of justice, the rule justice of the people. I was sorry, but I had to do my duty.

"If we punish those who would turn us to hangs," said I, with a successful defiance, "how much the more must we punish those who would give over thought to the pursuit of useless knowledge," and so with a gleeful satisfaction sent him off to the gallows.

"Ah, Parkard! Parkard! If only you'd listened to me earlier, Parkard!"

Nose the less, that quarrel made me extremely unhappy. Parkard was my only protégé, and it cost me much to keep him from him and think end of him with no one to listen to me, evening after evening.

That was a very miserable time for me, even before my last visit to Chichester. My long unemployed hours hung heavily on my hands. I kept away from home all day, partly to support a fiction that I was sedulously seeking another situation, and partly to escape the persistent question in my mother's eyes. "Why did you quarrel with Mr. Ruskin? Why did you? Why do you keep on going about with a swollen face and red, aching eyes?" I spent most of the morning in the newspaper-room of the public library, writing impossible applications for impossible posts. I remember that, among other things of that sort, I offered my services to a firm of private detectives, a sinister breed of tradesmen base jealousies now happily vanished from the world; and wrote, a paper of an advertisement for "stevedore," that I did not know what the shores of a starvation

might be, but that I was apt and willing to leave. And in the afternoons and evenings I wandered through the strange lights and shadows of my native valley and hated all created things. Until my wanderings were checked by the discovery that I was wearing out my boots.

The august, inconclusive master of that time!

I perceive I was an evil-tempered, ill-disposed youth with a great capacity for harm, but—

There was no excuse for hate.

It was wrong of me to hate individuals—to be rude, harsh and vindictive to this person or that—but indeed it would have been equally wrong to have taken the master off life made me without countermass. I see now clearly and calmly, what I then felt obscurely and with an unbalanced intensity, that my conditions were abominable. My work was tedious and laborious, and it took up an unreasonable proportion of my time. I was ill clothed, ill fed, ill housed, ill educated and ill trained, my will was suppressed and cramped to the pitch of torture, I had no reasonable pride in myself, and no reasonable chance of putting anything right. It was a life barely worth living. That a large proportion of the people about had no better a lot, that many had a worse, does not affect these facts. It was a life in which contentment would have been disgraceful. If some of them were contented or resigned, so much the worse for everyone. No doubt it was hasty and foolish of me to throw up my situation, but everything was so obviously vicious and foolish in our social organization that I do not feel disposed to blame myself even for that, except in so far as it pained my mother and caused her anxiety.

Think of the one comprehensive fact of the lookout!

That year was a bad year, a year of world-wide economic disorganization. Through their want of intelligent direction, the great "Trust" of American insurance, a gang of energetic, narrow-minded fire-insurance men, had wasted far more men than the whole world had any demand for (in those days there existed no means of estimating any need of that sort beforehand). They had done this without even consulting the economists of any other country. During their period of activity

they had drawn into their employment a great number of workers, and had erected a huge productive plant. It is manifestly just that people who do heading stupid things of this sort should suffer, but in the old days it was quite possible, it was customary, for the real blunders in such disasters to shift nearly all the consequences of their incapacity. No one thought it wrong for a light-witted "captain of industry" who had led his workpeople into overproduction—into the disproportionate manufacture, that is to say, of some particular article—to abandon and dismiss them. Nor was there anything to prevent the master�sistic underselling of some trade rival in order to surprise and destroy his trade, score his customers for each other's discarded needs, and shift a portion of one's punishment upon him. This operation of spurious underselling was known as "dumping." The American manufacturers were now dumping on the British market. The British employers were, of course, taking their loss out of their workpeople as much as possible, but in addition they were agitating for some legislation that would prevent—not stupid relative rates in production, but "dumping"—not the disease, but the consequences of the disease. The necessary knowledge to prevent either dumping or its cause, the uncontrolled production of commodities, did not exist, but this hardly weighed with them at all, and in response to these demands there had arisen a curious party of statisticians-protectivists who combined vague proposals for spasmodic response to these cumulative attacks from foreign manufacturers, with the very evident intention of achieving financial adventure. The dishonest and reckless element were, indeed, no evident in this movement as to add very greatly to the general atmosphere of disease and insecurity, and in the recoil from the prospect of fiscal power in the hands of the class of men known as the "New Financial" one heard frightened, old-fashioned statesmen asserting with passes that "dumping" didn't occur, or that it was a very charming sort of thing to happen. Nobody would face and lucidly the rather hideous truth of the business. The whole effect upon the mind of a cool observer was of a sort of unceasing jolting mind drifting over a series of irrational economic relationships, prices and employment tended

about like towns in an earthquake, and amidst the shifting masses were the common workpeople going on with their lives as well as they could, suffering, perplexed, unorganized, and for anything but violent, fruitless protests, impotent. You cannot hope now to understand the infinite want of adjustment in the old order of things. At one time there were people dying of actual starvation in India while men were burning available wheat in America. It sounds like the account of a particularly mad dream, does it not? It was a dream, a dream from which, to one at least, it passed an awakening.

To an youngster with the positiveness, the nationalism, of youth, it seemed that the strikes, and lockouts, the overproductions and misery, could not possibly result simply from ignorance and want of thought and feeling. We selected more dismal histories than these mental lags, these mere atmospheric duds. We fled therefore to that common refuge of the unhappy ignorant, a belief in villainy, insidious plots—we called them "plots"—against the poor.

You can still see how we figured it by looking up in any museum the curiosities of capital and labor that adorned the German and American socialist papers of the old time.

II

I had cast Nettie off in an eloquent epistle, had really imagined the affair was over forever—"I've done with women," I said to Perkins—and then there was silence for more than a week.

Before that week was over, I was wondering with a growing emotion what next would happen between us.

I found myself thinking constantly of Nettie, picturing her—sometimes with stern unkindness, sometimes with sympathetic remorse—recouping, regretting, realizing the absolute and that had come between us. At the bottom of my heart I no more believed that there was an end between us than that an end would come to the world. Had we not lived with other, had we not achieved an atmosphere of understanding? Of course she was more, of course I was her, and separations and final quarrels and harshness and distance were no more than disorders upon that eternal

fact. So at least I felt the thing, however I shaped my thought.

Whenever my imagination got to work at that week drew to its close, the cause is as a matter of course; I thought of her continually all day and dreamed of her at night. On Saturday night I dreamed of her very vividly. In the morning I had a raging thirst to see her.

That Sunday, my mother invited me to go to church very particularly. She had a double reason for that, she thought that it would certainly exercise a favorable influence upon my search for a situation throughout the next week, and in addition Mr. Gibbons, with a certain mystery behind his glasses, had promised to see what he could do for me, and she wanted to keep him up to that promise. I half consented, and then my desire for Nettie took hold of me. I told my mother I wasn't going to church, and set off about eleven to walk the seven-mile miles to Chelchill.

I got some bread and cheese at a little inn upon the way, and was in Chelchill park some hour about four. I did not go by the road past the house, and so round to the gardens, but cut over the grass beyond the second keeper's cottage, along a path Nettie used to call her own. It was a mere deer-track. It led up a miniature valley and through a pretty dell in which we had been accustomed to meet, and so through the hedges and along a narrow path close by the wall of the shrubbery to the gardens.

In my memory, that walk through the park before I came upon Nettie stands out very vividly. The long tramp before it is foreshadowed to a mere effect of dusty road and painful heat, but the broken valley and a sudden burst of doubts and associated expectations that came to me, stand out now as something significant, as something unforgettable, something essential to the meaning of all that followed. Where should I meet her? What would she say? I had asked these questions before and found an answer. Now they came again, with a trail of fresh疑虑, and I had no answer for them at all. As I approached Nettie, she seemed to be the mere bait of my youthful all-prosperity, the cushion of my sexual goals, and drew together and became over and above this a personality of her own, a personality and a mystery, a mystery I had started only to meet again.

I find a little difficulty in describing the quality of the old-world lovemaking so that it may be understandable now.

We young people had practically no preparation at all for the life and emotions of adolescence. Toward the young the world maintained a conspiracy of dissembling silence. There came no initiation. There were books, stories of a curiously conventional kind that insisted on certain qualities in every love-affair and greatly minimized one's natural desire for them—perfect trust, perfect loyalty, blushing devotion. Much of the complex essentials of love was altogether hidden. It was a dual system always in the old theory—a linking up that closed you both from almost all other interests. One said these things, got accidental glimpses of this and that, wondered and forgot, and so on grew. Then strange emotions, novel alarming desires, dreams strangely charged with feeling, an inexplicable impulse of self abandonment toward fine and pleasant strangers, began to trickle quietly amongst the familiar and partly egotistical and materialistic feelings of hygienic and girlishness. We were like浪子 (浪子) (wanderers) who had camped in the dry bed of a rippling river. Presently we were knee-deep and neck-deep in the flood! Our beings were suddenly going over from ourselves seeking the intimate being of others—we knew not why. This novel craving for abandonment to other personalities, and especially in those of the other sex, have us away. We were ashamed, and full of desire. We kept the thing a guilty secret, and were resolved to satisfy it against all the world. In this state it was we differed in the most accidental way against some other blindly seeking creature, and looked like innocent stars.

We were obsessed by the books we read, by all the talk that drifted about us touching so that once we had linked ourselves we were linked for life. Then afterward we discovered that other to whom we were linked was also an egoist, an individual thing of ideas and impulses.

So it was, I say, with the young of my class and most of the young people in our world. So it came about that I sought Nettie on the Sunday afternoons, and suddenly came upon her, light-bedecked, slenderly trimmish, hand-ey'd, with her soft,

sweet young face under the shady boughs of her boughs of straw, the pretty Venus I had resolved should be wholly mine.

There, all unaware of me still, she stood, my essential familiar, the embodiment of the finer thing in life for me—and moreover an unknown other, a person like myself.

She held a little book in her hand, open as if she were walking along and reading it. That changed to be her pose, but indeed she was standing quite still, looking away toward the gray and lichenous shrubbery wall and, as I think now, listening.

III.

I recall with a vivid precision her queer start when she heard the rustle of my approaching feet, her surprise, her eyes alight of dismay for me. I could recall, I believe, every significant word she spoke during our meeting, and most of what I said to her. At least, it seems I could, though indeed I may deserve myself. But I will not make the attempt. We were both too ill educated to speak our full meaning, we stamped out our humanization with clumsy, stereotyped phrases, you who are better taught would fail to catch our intention. The effect would be unity. But our first words I may give you, because, though they conveyed nothing to me at the time, afterward they meant much.

"Yes, Willis!" she said.

"I have come," I said—forgetting in the instant all the elaborate things I had intended to say. "I thought I would surprise you—"

"Surprise me?"

"Yes."

She stared at me for a moment. I can see her pretty face now as it looked at me—her imperishable dear face. She laughed a queer little laugh, and her color went for a moment, and then, as soon as she had spoken, came back again.

"Surprise me at what?" she said, with a rising note.

I was too intent to explain myself, to think of what might lie in that.

"I wanted to tell you," I said, "that I didn't mean quite—the things I put in my letter."

(To be continued)



Associated Press

THE BURNING OF LOAD BEARER'S MOTOR

(See "An Hour Before the Crash," page 46)



In the Days of the Comet

BY H. G. WELLS

BOOK THE FIRST—THE COMET CHAPTER THE SECOND—NATURE—(CONTINUED)

SHARON. The narrative tells the story of the Comet Change. When a young man he met a girl in a parlor in Chipping. She is refined in manner and gives up her position. He is actually dressed as a servant. Period: a man of his own age, who has learned a trade for wages and is deeply concerned about a comet whose path of approaching the earth is orbit. Why confined to think about something, he argues, when there is a possibility that the comet will hit the earth? There are bad in England, on account of overpopulation and the actions of American products in the English market. "Fathers and brothers were throughout the country. The upper classes engaged in marry little work, but the upper classes have been engaged in a number of his activities and religious church. However, he longs to set the get again, and one Sunday afternoon arrives to her house in Chipping.

IV

SHARON. Nelly and I had been
together, we had been just of
an age and contemporaries
together. Now we were a
year and three quarters older,
and she—her metamorphosis
was almost complete; and I
was still only at the begin-
ning of a man's long and
eventual career.

In an instant she grasped the situation. The hidden motives of her quick-expired little mind flashed out their intuitive scheme of action. She treated me with that next perfection of understanding a
young woman has for a boy.

"But how did you come?" she asked.
"I told her I had walked."

"Walked?" To an instant she was leading me toward the garden. I must be tired. I must come home with her at once and sit down. Indeed, it was after ten time (the Smarts had tea at the old-fashioned hour of five). Everyone would be as surprised to see me: "Fancy walking! Fancy! But she supposed a man thought nothing of seventeen miles. When could I have started?"

And all the while, by imperceptible movement, keeping me at a distance, with-
out even the touch of her hand.

"But, Nelly! I came over to talk to you!"

"My dear boy! The first, if you please! And lastly—wasn't we talking?"

The "dear boy" was a new note, a disturbance, that sounded oddly to me.

She quickened her pace a little.

"I wanted to explain—" I began.

Whatever I wanted to explain, I had no chance to do so. I said a few disengaging things, that she answered rather by her intonation than her words.

When we were well past the doorway, she slackened a little in her urgency, and so we came along the slope under the beeches to the garden. She kept her bright, straightforward-looking girlish eyes on me as we went; it seemed she did so all the time, for now I know, better than I did then, that every now and then she glanced over me and behind me toward the shrubbery. And all the while, behind her quick, hasty, incoherent talk, she was thinking.

Her dress marked the end of her transition.

Can I recall it?

Not, I am afraid, in the terms a woman would use. But her bright brown hair, which had once flowed down her back in a pale pigtail tied with a bit of violet ribbon, was now caught up into an intricate of pretty curves above her little ear and cheek and the soft, long lines of her neck. Her white dress had descended to her firm, her slender waist, which had once been a mere geographical expression, an imaginary line like the equator, was now a thing of flexible beauty. A year ago she had been a pretty girl's face sticking out from a little unimportant trunk that was carried upon an extremely active and efficient pair of brown-stockinged legs. Now there was coming a strange new body that flowed beneath her clothes with a tempoless resonance. Every movement, and particularly the small dip of her hand and arm to the unaccustomed skirts she gathered about her, and a graceful, forward inclination that had come to her, called softly to my eyes. A very fine head—I suppose you would call it a head—of green gossamer, that some less valiant instinct had told her to fling about her shoulders, clung now closely to the young undulations of her body and now crept and fluttered out for a moment in a breath of wind, and then were shy, independent tentacles with a street to disrupt, came into monitory contact with my arm.

She caught it back and reproved it.

We went through the green gate in the high garden wall. I held it open for her to pass through, for this was one of my restricted stock of stiff politenesses, and then for a second she was near touching me. So we came to the little army of flower beds near the head gardener's cottage and the vista of "glass" on our left. We walked between the low edgings and beds of begonias, and into the shadow of a yew hedge within twenty yards of that very good with the goldfish, at whose brink we had plighted our vows, and so we came to the western-shaded path.

The door was wide open and she walked in before me. "Guess who has come to see us!" she cried.

Her father answered indistinctly from the parlor, and a chair creaked. I judged he was disturbed in his nap.

"Mother!" she called in her clear, young voice. "Puss!"

Puss was her name.

She told them, in a marveling key, that I had walked all the way from Clayton, and they gathered about me and echoed her notes of surprise.

"You'd better sit down, Willie," said her father, "now you have got here Hawn's poor mother!"

He looked at me curiously as he spoke.

He was dressed in his Sunday clothes, a sort of lavenderish tweed, but the waistcoat was unbent for greater comfort in his shoulders. He was a brown-eyed, ready man, and I still have in my mind the bright effect of the reddish hair that started out from his chest to flow down into his beard. He was short but strongly built, and his broad and muscular were the biggest things about him. She had taken all the possibility of beauty he possessed, his clear skin, his bright hair, brown eyes, and worked them to a certain quickness she got from her mother. Her mother I remember as a sharp-eyed woman of great activity; she always seemed to me now to have been bringing in or taking out meals, or doing some such service, and so me—for my mother's sake and my own—he was always working and busy. Puss was a youngster of fourteen, perhaps, of whom a bare, bright skin and a pale skin like her mother's are the chief traces on my memory. All these people were very kind to me always, and among them there was a common recognition, sometimes very





Photo by Diane L. Lewis

SHOOTE MY FEET WITH ALL MY STRENGTH AGAINST THE FLOOR OF THE WOOD
BEFORE ME

agreeably finding expression, that I was clever. They all stood about me as if they were a little afraid.

"Sit down!" said her father. "Give him a chair, Puss."

We talked a little stiffly; they were all surprised by my sudden appearance, dusky, fatigued and white-faced; but Nettie did not seem to keep the conversation going.

"There!" she cried suddenly, as if she were vexed. "I declare!" and she darted out of the room.

"Lord! what a girl it is!" said Mrs. Stuart. "I don't know what's come to her."

It was half an hour before Nettie came back. It seemed a long time to me, and yet she had been running, for within the same time again she was out of breath. In the meantime, I had thought out casually that I had given up my place at Rampton. "I can do better than that," I said.

"I left my book in the dell," she said, panting. "Is tea ready?" and that was her apology.

We didn't shake down less readily even with the coming of the tea things. Tea at the gardener's cottage was a serious meal, with a big cake and little cakes, and preserves and fruit, a fat spread upon a table. You must imagine me, rather, awkward and preoccupied, perplexed by the something that was inexplicably unexpected in Nettie, saying little and gazing across the cake at her, and all the eloquence I had been concentrating for the previous twenty-four hours suddenly lost somewhere in the back of my mind. Nettie's father tried to set me talking; he had a liking for my gift of ready speech, for his own ideas came with difficulty, and he was pleased to hear me pouring out my views. Indeed, over there I was, I think, even more talkative than with Pupland, though to the world at large I was a shy young lad. "You ought to write it out for the newspaper," he used to say. "That's what you ought to do. I never heard such nonsense."

Or: "You've got the gift of the gab, young man. We ought to let 'em make a lawyer of you!"

But that afternoon, even in his eyes, I didn't shine. Falling my other shoulder, he reverted to my search for a situation, but even that did not engage me.

V

For a long time I feared I should have to go back to Clayton without another word to Nettie. She seemed insensible to the need I felt for a talk with her, and I was shrinking even of a sudden demand for that before them all. It was a transparent instance of her mother's, who had been watching my face, that sent me out at last together to do something—I forgot now what—in one of the greenhouses. Whatever that little session may have been it was the meanest, most banalized excuse, a door to shut, or a window to close, and I don't think it got done.

Nettie hesitated and obeyed. She led the way through one of the greenhouses. It was a low, round, brick-flowered arbor between staging that bore a close crowd of pots of ferns, and behind big, branching plants that were spread and nailed overhead so as to make an impervious cover of leaves, and in that close, green privacy she stopped and turned on me suddenly like a creature at bay.

"Isn't the matinée here lovely?" she said, and looked at me with eyes that said, "Now?"

"Nettie," I began, "I was a fool to write to you as I did."

She started me by the sleeve that flashed out upon her face. But she said nothing, and stood waiting.

"Nettie," I plunged, "I can't do without you—I—I love you."

"If you loved me," she said truly, watching the white fingers she plunged among the green branches of a solanum, "could you write the things you do to me?"

"I don't mean them," I said. "At least, not always."

I thought really they were very good letters, and that Nettie was stupid to think otherwise, but I was for the moment clearly aware of the impossibility of conveying that to her.

"You wrote them."

"But then I travel seventeen miles to say I don't mean them."

"Yes. But perhaps you do."

I think I was at a loss; then I said, not very clearly, "I don't."

"You think you—you love me, Willie. But you don't."

"I do, Nettie! You know I do."

For answer she shook her head.

I made what I thought was a most heroic plunge. "Nestie," I said, "I'd rather have you than—than my own opinions."

The solicitude still engaged her. "You think so now," she said.

I broke out into protestations.

"No," she said shortly. "It's different now."

"But why should two human beings so much differ?" I said.

"It isn't only the known. But it is different. It's different—for good."

She halted a little with that sentence seeking her expression. She looked up abruptly into my eyes and moved, indeed slightly, but with the intention that she thought our talk might end.

But I did not mean it to end like that.

"For good?" said I. "Not Nestie Nestie? You don't mean that?"

"I do," she said deliberately, still looking at me, and with all her pose conveying her finality. She seemed to brace herself for the outbreak that must follow.

Of course I became wrothy. But I did not rebuke her. She stood entrenched, doing her calculations like game into my scattered, discomfited attack. I remembered that our talk took the absurd form of disputing whether I could be in love with her or not. And there was I, present to consider, in a deepening and widening distress of soul because she could stand there, defensive, brighter and prettier than ever and in some inexplicable way cut off from me and inaccessible.

You know we had never been together before without atmosphere of embarrasment, without a faintly guilty, quite delightful enjoyment.

I pleaded, I argued. I tried to show that even my harsh and difficult critics came from my desire to come wholly into contact with her. I made suggested, the statements of the longing I felt for her when I was away, of the shock and misery of finding her estranged and cool. She looked at me, feeling the failing of my speech and impotence to its ideas. I had no doubt—whatever poverty my words, really written down now, might convey—that I was eloquent then. I meant most intensely what I said, indeed I was wholly concentrated upon it. It was not upon returning to her with absolute intimacy my sense of distance, and the greatness of my desire. I talked toward her pain-

fully and obstinately through a jungle of words.

Her face changed very slowly—by such imperceptible degrees as when at dawn light comes into a clear sky. I could tell that I touched her, that her hardness was in some manner softening, her determination softening toward hesitation. The habit of an old familiarity looked somewhere within her. But she would not let me reach her.

"No," she cried abruptly, starting into motion.

She laid a hand on my arm. A wonderful new friendliness came into her voice. "It's impossible, Willie. Everything is different now—everything. We make a mistake. We two young folks made a mistake and everything is different forever. Yes, you."

She turned about.

"Nestie!" cried I, and still pretending pursued her along the narrow aisle between us, staring toward the bathroom door. I pursued her like an accusation, and she went before me like one who is guilty and ashamed. So I recall it now.

She would not let me talk to her again.

Yet I could see that my talk to her had altogether abolished the close-cut distance of our meeting in the park. Ever and again I found her hand open upon me. They expressed something novel—a surprise, as though she realized an unexpected relationship, and a sympathetic pity. And still—something defensive.

When we got back to the carriage, I fell talking rather more freely with her father about the reorganization of railways, and my spirits and temper had so far mended at the realization that I could still produce an effect upon Nestie, that I was even playful with Puss. Mrs. Stuart judged from that that things were better with me than they were, and began to beam brightly.

But Nestie remained thoughtful and said very little. She was lost in perplexities I could not fathom, and presently she slipped away from us and went upstairs.

VI

I was, of course, too fatigued to walk back to Clayton, but I had a shilling and a penny in my pocket for the train between Cheltenham and Two Mile Stone, and that

much of the distance I proposed to do in the train. And when I got ready to go, Nellie assured me by making up to the most remarkable difficulties for me. I must, she said, go by the road. It was altogether too dark for the short way to the bolger gates.

I pointed out that it was moonlight. "With the comet thrown in," said old Stuart,

"No," she insisted, "you must go by the road."

I still disputed.

She was standing near me. "To please me," she urged, in a quick underoice, and with a persuasive look that puzzled me. Even as the moment I asked myself why should that please her?

I might have agreed had she not followed that up with "The hollies by the shrubbery are as dark as pitch. And there are the damboands."

"I'm not afraid of the dark," said I.

"Nor of the damboands, either."

"But those dogs! Supposing one was loose!"

That was a girl's argument, a girl who still had to understand that fear is an overt argument only for her own sex. I thought too of these grisly, half-brutes waiting at their chains and of the chores they could make of a night when they heard hallooed footsteps along the edge of the Killing Wood, and the thoughts banished my wish to please her. Like most imaginative natures I was acutely capable of dread and misgivings, and constantly occupied with their suppression and concealment, and to refuse the short cut when it might appear that I did it on account of half a dozen almost certainly chained dogs, was impossible.

So I set off in spite of her, feeling valiant and glad to be so easily brave, but a little sorry that she should think herself crossed by me.

A thin cloud veiled the moon, and the way under the beeches was dark and indistinct. I was not so preoccupied with my love-affairs as to neglect what I will confess was always my custom at night across that wild and lonely park. I made myself a date by flattening a big flat to and of my twisted handkerchief and tying the other about my wrist, and with this in my pocket, went on confidant.

And it chanced that, as I emerged from

the hollies by the corner of the shrubbery, I was startled to come unexpectedly upon a young man in evening dress smoking a cigar.

I was walking on haul, so that the sound I made was slight. He stood clear in the moonlight, his cigar glowed like a blood-red star, and it did not occur to me at the time that I advanced toward him almost invisibly in an impenetrable shadow.

"Hello!" he cried, with a sort of amiable challenge. "I'm here first!"

I came out into the light. "Who care if you are?" said I.

I jumped at once to an interpretation of his words. I knew that there was an interesting dispute between the house people and the village public about the use of this track, and it is needless to say where my sympathies fell in that dispute.

"Eh?" he cried in surprise.

"Thought I would run away, I suppose," said I, and came close up to him.

All my enormous hatred of his class had flared up at the sight of his costume, at the fenced challenge of his words. I knew him. He was Edward Verrell, one of the men who owned not only this great estate but more than half of Rurdon's pot-tanks, and who had interests and possessions, collieries and rents, all over the district of the Four Towns. He was a gallant youngster, people said, and very clever. Young as he was there was talk of Parliament for him; he had been a great success at the university, and he was being adulatory popularised among us. He took with a light confidence, as a matter of course, advantages that I would have fired the rack to get, and I truly believed myself a better man than he. He was, as he stood there, a concentrated figure of all that filled me with bitterness. One day he had stopped in a room outside our house, and I remember the thrill of rage with which I had seized the distill'd admiration in my mother's eyes as she peered through her blind at him. "That's young Mr. Verrell," she said. "They say he's very clever."

"They would," I answered. "Darn them and help!"

But that is by the way. He was already accustomed to find himself face to face with a man. His nose changed. "Who the devil are you?" he asked.

"My return was the sharp expedient of re-entering. "Who the devil are you?"

"Well," he said.

"I'm coming along this path if I like," I said. "See? It's a public path—just as this used to be public land. You've stolen the land—you and yours, and now you want to steal the right of way. You'll ask me to get off the face of the earth next. I don't object. See?"

I was shorter and I suppose a couple of years younger than he, but I had the unprepossessing club in my pocket gripped ready, and I would have fought with him very cheerfully. But he fell a step backward as I came toward him.

"Socialist, I presume?" he said, alert and quiet and with the faintest note of badinage.

"One of many."

"We're all socialists nowadays," he remarked philosophically, "and I haven't the faintest intention of disputing your right of way."

"You'd better not," I said.

"No?"

"No."

He replaced his cigar, and there was a brief pause. "Catching a train?" he drawled.

I assumed absurd not to answer. "Yes," I said, shortly.

He said it was a pleasant evening for a walk.

I hovered for a moment, and there was my path before me, and he stood aside. There seemed nothing to do but to go on. "Good night," said he, as that situation took effect.

I growled a curtly good night.

I lit like a bombshell of swearing that must presently burst with some violence as I went on my silent way. He had so completely got the best of our encounter.

VII

There comes a memory, an odd encounter of two entirely divergent things, that stands out with the bluntest vividness.

As I went across the last open meadow, following the short cut to Checkhill station, I perceived I had two shadows.

The thing jumped into my mind and stopped its tumult flow for a moment. I remember the insolgent detachment of my sudden return. I turned sharply,

and stood looking at the moon and the great, white comet, that the drift of the clouds had now rather suddenly unveiled.

The comet was perhaps twenty degrees from the moon. What a wonderful thing it looked floating there, a greenish-white apparition in the dark-blue deep! It looked brighter than the moon because it was smaller, but the shadow it cast, though clearer cut, was much fainter than the moon's shadow. I went on walking these farms, watching my two shadows precede me.

I am totally unable to account for the sequence of my thoughts on this occasion. But suddenly, as if I had come on this new fact round a corner, the comet was out of my mind again, and I was due to face with an absolutely new idea. I wonder sometimes if the two shadows I cast, one with a sort of feminine faintness with regard to the other and not quite so tall, may not have suggested the word or the thought of an aigmentation to my mind. All I have clear is that with the reprise of twilight I knew what it was had brought the youth in evening dress outside the shrubbery. Of course! He had come to meet Nestie!

Once the mental process was started it took no time at all. The day which had been full of perplexities for me, the mysterious, inscrutable thing that had held Morris and myself apart, the unaccountable, strange something in her manner, was revealed and explained.

I knew now why she had looked guilty at my appearance, what had brought her out that afternoon, why she had hurried in, the nature of the "book" she had run back to fetch, the reason why she had wished me to go back by the highroad, and why she had pitied me. It was all in the instant clear to me.

You must imagine me a black, little creature, suddenly stricken stiff—for a moment standing rigid—and then again suddenly becoming active with an important gesture, becoming audible with an insatiable cry, with two little shadows reaching my dismay, and above that figure you must conceive a great wide space of meadow grass, dimmed by the looming suggestion of distant trees—trees very low and late and dim, and over it all the deserted serenity of that wonderful, luminous night.

For a little while this realization stunned my mind. My thoughts came to a pause, staring at my discovery. Meanwhile my

feet and my previous direction carried me through the warm darkness to Checkfield station with its little lights, to the telegraph window, and so to the train.

I remember myself, as it were, waking up to the thing—I was alone in one of the dingy third-class compartments of that train—and the sudden, acutely frantic, insurgeant of my rage. I stood up with the cry of an angry animal, and strode my feet with all my strength against the panel of wood before me.

Curiously enough I have completely forgotten my mood after that for a little while, but I know that later, for a minute perhaps, I hung for a time out of the carriage with

the door open, contemplating a leap from the train. It was to be a desperate leap, and then I would go storming back to bed, dismount him, overtake him; and I hung, urging myself to do it. I don't remember how it was I decided not to do this, at last, but in the end I didn't.

When the train stopped at the next station, I had given up all thoughts of going back. I was sitting in the corner of the carriage with my bruised and wounded hand pressed under my arm, and still insensate to its pain, trying to think out clearly a scheme of action—action that should express the monstrous indignation that possessed me.

CHAPTER TWO: TIDES—THE REVOLVING.

II



HAT comet is going to hit the earth!"

So said one of the two men who got into the train and settled down.

"Ah!" said the other man. "They do say it is made of gas, that comet. We don't know up, shall we?"

What did it matter to me?

I was thinking of revenge—revenges against the primary conditions of my being. I was thinking of Nettie and her lover, I was firmly resolved he should not have her—though I had to kill them both to prevent it. I did not care what she might happen, if only that end were assured. All my treasured passions had turned to rage. I would have accepted eternal torment that night without a second thought, to be certain of revenge. A hundred possibilities of action, a hundred stormy situations, a whirl of violent schemes, chased one another through my shamed, exasperated head. The sole prospect I could endure was of some gigantic, inexorably cruel vindication of my humiliated self.

And Nettie? I loved Nettie still, but now with the intensest jealousy, with the keen, unquenching hatred of wounded pride and baffled, passionate desire.

II

As I came down the hill from Clayton Cross—for my shilling and a penny only

permitted my travelling by train as far as Two-Mile Stone, and thence I had to walk over the hill—I remember very vividly a tall man with a shill voice who was preaching under a gas lamp against a boarding to a thin crowd of Sunday evening loafers. He was a short man, bald, with a little, thin, curly beard and hair and watery blue eyes, and he was preaching that the end of the world drew near.

I think that is the first time I heard any one link the comet with the end of the world. He had got that jumbled up with international politics and prophecies from the book of Daniel.

I stopped to hear him only for a moment or so. I do not think I should have halted at all but his crowd blocked my path, and the sight of his queer, wild expression, the gesture of his upward pointing finger, held me.

"There is the end of all your sins and follies," he bawled. "There! There is the star of judgments, the judgments of the most High God! It is appointed unto all men to die—unto all men to die!"—his voice charged to a canon flat chant—"and after death, the Judgment! The Judgment!"

I passed and threaded my way through the bystanders and went on, and his curious, bawling voice pursued me. I went on with the thoughts that had occupied me before—where I could buy a revolver, and how I might master its use—and probably I should have forgotten all about him had he not taken a part in the hideous dream

that ended the little sleep I had that night. For the most part I lay awake thinking of Nesta and her lover.

Then came three strange days—three days that seem now to have been wholly concentrated upon one business.

The dominant business was the purchase of my revolver. I held myself reluctantly to the idea that I must either rescue myself by some extraordinary act of vigor and violence in Nesta's eyes or I must kill her. I would not let myself fall away from that. I felt that if I let this matter pass, my last shred of pride and honor would pass with it, that for the rest of my life I should never deserve the slightest respect or any woman's love. Pride kept me to my purpose between my goals of passion.

Yet it was not easy to buy that revolver.

I had a kind of shyness of the moment when I should have to face the shopkeeper, and I was particularly anxious to have a story ready if he should see fit to ask questions why I bought such a thing. I determined to say I was going to Texas, and I thought it might prove useful there. Texas, in those days, had the reputation of a wild, lawless land. As I knew nothing of caliber or impact, I wanted also to be able to talk with a steady face at what distance a man or woman could be killed by the weapon that might be offered me. I was pretty cool-headed in relation to such practical aspects of my affair. I had some little difficulty in finding a gunsmith. In Clayton there were some rock-shops and so forth in a cycle shop, but the only revolver these people had impressed me as being too small and toplike for my purpose. It was in a perfumery window in the narrow High Street of Swindles that I found my chance, a reasonably clumsy and serious-looking implement disclosed, "As used in the American army."

I had drawn out my balance from the savings bank, a matter of two pounds and more, to make this purchase, and I found it at last a very easy transaction. The perfumier told me where I could get ammunition, and I went home that night with bulging pockets, an armed man.

The purchase of my revolver was, I say, the chief business of those days, but you must not think I was so intent upon it as to be insensible to the other things that were happening in the streets through which I went seeking the means to effect

my purpose. They were full of maneuvering, the whole region of the Four Towns seemed loosening from its narrow shores. The ordinary, healthy flow of people going to work, people going about their business, was stalled and checked. Numbers of men stood about the streets in knots and groups, as companies gather and catch in the blood-vessels in the opening stages of inflammation. The women looked haggard and worried. The workmen had refused the proposed reduction of their wages, and the lockout had begun. They were already at "play." The Conciliation Board was doing its best to keep the coal miners and masters from a breach, but young Lord Retford, the greatest of our coal owners and landlord of all Swindles and half Clayton, was taking a fine, upstanding attitude that made the breach inevitable. He was a handsome young man, a gallant young man, his pride revolved in the idea of being destined to be a "lot of bally miners," had he meant, he said, to make a fight for it. The world had treated him sumptuously from his earliest years, the slaves in the common stock of five thousand people had gone to pay for his handsome upbringing, and large, romantic, expensive ambitions filled his generously naged mind. He had early disdained himself at Oxford by his scornful attitude towards democracy. There was something that appealed to the imagination in his fine antagonism to the crowd—on the one hand, was the brilliant young nobleman, picturesquely alone, on the other, the ugly, inexpensive multitude, dressed indolently in slop clothes, under-educated, underfed, coarse, bare, and with a wicked inclination for work and a wicked appetite for the good things it could so easily get. For common imaginative purposes one left out the policeman from the design, the side of policemen protecting the landlord, and ignored the fact that while Lord Retford had his hands immovably and legally on the workmen's shelter and bread, they could reach him to the skin only by some violent breach of the law.

He lived at Lowchester House, five miles or so beyond Checkhill, but partly to show how little he cared for his antagonists, and partly no doubt to keep himself in touch with the negotiations that were still going on, he was visible almost every day in and

about the Four Towns, driving that big motor car of his that could take him thirty miles an hour. The English passion for fair play one might have thought sufficient to rule this bold procedure of any dangerous possibilities, but he did not go altogether free from punishment, and on one occasion, at least, an uninterested Irish woman shook her fist at him.

A dark, quiet crowd, that was greater each day, a crowd more than half women, headed, as a cloud will sometimes hang permanently upon a mountain crest, in the market place outside the Clayton town-hall, where the conference was held.

I considered myself justified in regarding Lord Redcar's passing automobile with a special animosity because of the looks it cast.

We held our little house on lease; the owner was a mean, niggard, old man named Pettigrew, who lived in a villa adorned with plaster images of dogs and goats, at Overcaste, and in spite of our specific agreement, he would do no repair for us at all. He rented rooms in my mother's tenement, Once, long ago, she had been bedridden with her rent, with half of her quarter's rent, and he had extended the days of grace a month; but since that same day she might need the same mercy again made her his object alone. She was afraid even to ask that he should cause the roof to be mended for fear he might take offence. But one night the rain poured in on her bed and gave her a cold, and shivered and soaked her poor, old, patchwork counterpane. Then she got me to compose an excessively polite letter to old Pettigrew, begging him as a favor to perform his legal obligation. It was part of the general knowledge of those days that such one-sided law as existed was a profound mystery to the common people, as previous impossible to ascertain, as machinery impossible to set in motion. Instead of the clearly written code, the bold statements of rules and principles that are now at the service of every one, the law was the meddled secret of the legal profession. Poor people, overworked people, had constantly to submit to party wrongs because of the intolerable uncertainty not only of law but of cost, and of the demands upon time and energy proceedings might make. There was indeed no justice for anyone too poor to command a good solicitor's deference and loyalty; there was

nothing but rough police protection and the magistrate's grudging or extreme leniency for the mass of the population. The civil law, in particular, was a mysterious, upper-class weapon, and I can imagine no injustice that would have been sufficient to induce my poor old mother to appeal to it.

All this began to sound incredible. I can only assure you that it was so.

But I, when I learnt that old Pettigrew had been down to tell my mother all about his rheumatism, to inspect the roof, and to allege that nothing was needed, gave way to my most frequent emotion in those days, a burning indignation, and took the matter into my own hands. I wrote and asked him, with a withering air of ruthlessness, to have the roof repaired "as per agreement," and added, "if not done in one week from now we shall be obliged to take proceedings." I had not mentioned the high line of conduct to my mother at first, and so when old Pettigrew came down in a state of great agitation with my letter in his hand, she was almost equally agitated.

"How could you write to old Mr. Pettigrew like that?" she asked me.

I said that old Pettigrew was a shameful old rascal, or words to that effect, and I am afraid I behaved in a very unchristian way to her when she said that she had settled everything with him—she wouldn't say how, but I could guess well enough—and that I was to promise her, promise her faithfully, to do nothing more in the matter. I wouldn't promise her

And—having nothing better to employ me thus—I presently went racing to old Pettigrew in order to put the whole thing before him in what I considered a proper light. Old Pettigrew studied my dictation; he saw me coming up his front steps—I can still see his queer, old nose and the wrinkled brow over his eyes and the little wisp of grey hair that showed over the corner of his widow-blind—and he attracted his servant to put up the chain when she answered the door, and to tell me he would not see me. So I had to fall back upon my pen.

Then it was, as I had no idea what were the proper "proceedings" to take, the brilliant idea occurred to me of appealing to Lord Redcar at the grand luncheon, and, as it were, our final trial, and point-

ing out to him that his security for his nest was depositing in old Pettigrew's hands. I added some general observations on household, the taxation of ground rents, and the private ownership of the soil. And Lord Redcar, whose spirit revolved at despatch, and who cultivated a port, haughty manner with his inferior to show as much, caused my distinguished friend forever by causing his secretary to present his accomplishments to me, and his request that I would mind my own business and leave him to manage his. At which I was so greatly enraged that I first took this man into my charge, insatiable person, and then dashed it dramatically all over the floor of my room— from which, to keep my mother from the job, I afterward had to pick it up laboriously on all fours.

I was still meditating a tremendous re-tort, an indictment of all Lord Redcar's class, their manners, morals, economic and political crimes, when my trouble with Netta arose to wrench all minor troubles. Yet not so completely but that I snarled aloud when his lordship's motor car whizzed by me, as I went about upon my long, rambling quest for a weapon. And I discovered after a time that my mother had broken her nose and was lame. Fearing to irritate me by bringing the thing before me again, she had set herself to move her bed out of the way of the drop without my help, and she had knocked her knee. All her poor humiliations, I discovered, were covering now close to the peeling bed-room walls; there had come a vast discolouration of the ceiling and a washstand was in the depths of the middle of her character.

It is necessary that I should set these things before you, should give the key of inconsistency and weakness to which all things were arranged, should suggest the breath of trouble that stirred along the hot, summer streets, the anxiety about the strike, the rations and migrations, the gatherings and meetings, the increasing gravity of the policeman's faces, the combustive headlines of the local papers, the knots of policemen who surrounded anyone who passed near the office, smoking lamps but in my mind, you must understand, each impression came and went, irregularly, they made a moving background, changing solutions in my preoccupation by that darkly shaping purpose to which a revolver was so imperative as essential.

Along the darkling streets, under the sultry crowd, the thought of Netta, my Netta, and her penitent looks made over a world, inflammatory spot of purpose in my brain.

III

It was three days after—on Wednesday, that is to say—that the first of these minor outbreaks occurred that ended in the bloody affair of Peacock Green and the flooding out of the entire line of the Southwicks' collieries. It was the only one of these disturbances I was destined to see, and, at most, a mere trivial preliminary.

The accounts that have been written of this affair very vary widely. To read them is to realize the extraordinary callousness of truth that distinguished the press of those later days. In my bureau I have several sets of the daily papers of the old time—I collect them, as a matter of fact—and three or four of about that date I have just this moment taken out and looked through to refresh my impression of what I saw. They lie before me, queer, shrivelled, incriminate things, the cheap paper has already become brittle and brown and split along the creases, the ink faded or obscured, and I have to handle them with the greatest care when I place among their ragged headlines. As I sit here in this serene place, their quality throughout, their arrangement, their tone, their arguments and elaborations, read as though they came from drugged and drowsy men. They give one the effect of faded howling, of accents and shouts heard faintly in a little phonograph. It is only on Monday I find, and buried deep below the war news, that these publications contain any intimation that unusual happenings were forward in Clayton and Southwicks.

What I saw was toward evening. I had been leisurely so shot with my new possession. I had walked out with a four or five miles across a patch of moorland, and down to a secluded little copse full of bluebells, halfway along the highroad between Lent and Stafford. Here I had spent the afternoon, superintending and punishing with curial deliberation and grim persistency. I had brought an old rifle-case of ours with me, that folded and unfolded, and each shot-hole I made I marked and numbered.

bered to compare with any other on-draught. At last I was satisfied that I could tell a playing card at thirty paces, now times out of tune, the light was getting too bad for me to see my painted half-eyes, and in that state of quiet maddness that sometimes comes with hunger to penetrate men, I returned by the way of Swarthington toward my home.

The road I followed came down between banks of wretched-looking workmen's houses, in close-packed rows on either side, and took upon itself the side of Swarthington High Street, where, at a lamp and a pillar-box, the stream turned larger. So far for that dirty, hot way had been unusually quiet and empty, but beyond the corner, where the first group of beer shops clustered, it became populous. It was very quiet still, even the children were a little inactive, but there were a lot of people strutting about dispersively in little groups, and with a general direction toward the gates of the Bantock Barden colliery.

The place was being picketed, although at that time the miners were still nominally at work, and the conferences between master and men were still in session at Clayton town hall. But one of the men employed at the Bantock Barden pit, Jack Bruce, was a socialist, and he had distinguished himself by a violent letter upon the crisis to the leading socialist paper in England, "*The Clarion*," in which he had advocated among the miners of Lord Redcar. The publication of this had been followed by instant dismissal. As Lord Redcar writes day or so later to the "*Times*":—"I have that '*Times*,' I have all the London papers of the last month before the Change." The man was paid off and kicked out. Any self-respecting employer would do the same."

The thing had happened overnight, and the men did not at once take a close look upon what was, after all, a very intricate and debatable question. But they came out in a sort of semi-official strike from all Lord Redcar's collieries beyond the canal that bisects Swarthington. They did so without formal notice, constituting a branch of committee by this midday creation. But in the long labor struggle of the old days, the workers were constantly putting themselves in the wrong, and committing felonies through that overpowering craving for dramatic promptness natural to an-educated mind.

All the men had not come out of the Bantock Barden pit. Something was wrong there, an indecision, if nothing else; the mine was still working, and there was a rumor that men from Durham had been held in residence by Lord Redcar, and were already in the mine. Now, it is absolutely impossible to ascertain certainly how things stood at that time. The newspapers say this and that, but nothing trustworthy remains.

I believe I should have gone striding through the dark stage of that stagnant industrial drama without asking a question, if Lord Redcar had not chosen to come upon the scene about the same time as myself and unconsciously end its stagnation.

He had promised that if the men wanted a struggle he would put up the best fight they had ever had. He had been active all that afternoon in meeting the quarrel half-way, and preparing as completely as possible for the arrival here of "*blacklegs*," as we called them, who were, he said and we believed, to replace the strikers in his pit.

I was an eyewitness of the whole of the affair outside the Bantock Barden pit, and I do not know what happened.

Picture to yourself how the thing came to me.

I was descending a steep, cobbled, crooked road between back-to-back footways, perhaps six feet high, upon which, in a momentous action, opened the long-room doors of rows of dark, low cottages. The perspective of squat, blue slate roofs and chattering chimney-pots drifted downward toward the regular open spaces before the colliery, a space covered with rank, wheel-scarred mud, with a patch of weedy clump to the left and the colliery gates to the right. Beyond, High Street with its slope resumed again in good earnest and went on, and the lines of the main tramway that started out from before my feet, and were being shunted and scurried visible with reflected sky-light and there lost in a shadow, took up, for an area moment, the gaudy yellow illumination of a newly lit gas lamp as they vanished round the bend. Beyond spread a darkling marsh of houses, an infinitude of little smoking houses, and straggling, ramshackle churches, public houses, board schools, and other buildings amidst the prevailing chimneys of Swarthington. To the right, very clear and relatively high,

the Buxton Bards' pit mouth was marked by a giant lattice bearing a great black wheel, very sharp and distinct in the twilight. In an irregular perspective beyond, were others following the fit of the rooms. The general effect, as one came down the hill, was of a dark, compressed life beneath a very high and wide and luminous ceiling sky against which these pit wheels rose. And, rising the only sparseness of that heaven, was the great comet, now green-white, and wonderful for all who had eyes to see.

The fading afterglow of the sunset threw up all the contours and skyline to the west, and the comet rose eastward, out of the pouring tumults of smoke from Blaebot's doors. The moon had still to rise.

By this time the comet had begun to assume the sheathlike form still familiar through the medium of a thousand photographs and sketches. At first it had been an almost telescopic speck; it had lengthened to the dimensions of the greatest star in the heavens; it had still grown, hour by hour, in its incredibly swift, its relentless and inevitable rush upon our earth, until it had equalled and surpassed the moon. Now it was the most splendid thing this sky of earth has ever held. I have never seen a photograph that gave a proper idea of it. Never, at any time, did it assume the conventional-tailed comet; it was supposed to have. Astronomers talked of its double tail, one preceding it, and one trailing behind it, but these were Unconcerned to nothing, so that it had either the form of a halving puff of luminous smoke with an interior, brighter heart. It rose, a hot, yellow color, and only began to show its distinctive greenness when it was close of the morn of evening.

It commanded attention for a space. For all my earthly concentration of mind, I could but stare at it for a moment with a vague realization that, after all, in some way, so strange and glorious as object could have significance, could not possibly be a matter of absolute indifference to the universe and values of my life.

But how?

I thought of Parkard. I thought of the panic and confusion that were spreading in the very matter, and of the assurance of scientific men that the thing weighed so little, at the utmost, a few hundred tons of thinly diffused gas and dust, that even

were it to smite the earth fully, nothing could possibly ensue. And, after all, what earthly significance has anyone found in the stars?

Then, as one still descended, the houses and buildings rose up, the presence of those watching groups of people, the tension of the situation, and one forgot the sky.

Preoccupied with myself and with my dark dream about Nettie and my horse, I threaded my course through the impinging threat of this gathering, and was caught unawares, when suddenly the whole scene flushed into drama.

The attraction of everyone: swaying round with an irresistible magnetism toward High Street, and caught me as a truth of water might catch a wisp of hay. Abruptly the whole crowd was sounding one note. It was not a word, it was a sound that mingled throat and gullet, something between a prolonged "Ahh" and "Ugh." Then, with a hoarse intensity of anger, came a low, heavy baying, "Hoof—hoof—oof" a note stupendously expressive of animal savagery. "Toot, toot!" said Lord Rodnor's automobile in ridiculous repartee. "Toot, toot!" One heard it whining and shrilling as the crowd obliged it to slow down.

Everybody seemed to notice toward the solitary gate, I, too, with the others.

I heard it shout. Through the dark figures about me I saw the motor car stop and move forward again, and had a glipse of something writhing on the ground.

It was alleged afterward that Lord Rodnor was driving, and that he quite deliberately knocked down a little boy who would not get out of his way. It is asserted with equal confidence that the boy was a man who tried to pass across the front of the motor car as it came slowly through the crowd, and who escaped by a hair's breadth, and then slipped on the, tram rail and fell down. I have both accounts set forth, under screaming headlines, in two of these newspapers upon my desk. No one could ever ascertain the truth. Indeed, in such a blind tumult of passion, could there be any truth?

There was a rush forward, the bars of the car sounded, everything swayed violently to the right for perhaps ten yards or so, and there was a report like a pistol shot.

For a moment everyone seemed running away. A woman, carrying a shawl

wrapped child, blundered into me, and sent me rolling back. Everyone thought of firearms, but, as a matter of fact, something had gone wrong with the motor, what in those old-fashioned countenances was called a *bark fire*. A thin puff of black smoke hung in the air behind the thing. The majority of the people scattered back in a disorderly fashion and left a clear space about the struggle that centered upon the motor car.

The man or boy who had fallen was lying on the ground with no one near him, a black lump, an extended arm and two sprawling feet. The motor car had stopped, and its three occupants were standing up. Six or seven black figures surrounded the car, and appeared to be holding on to it as if to prevent it from starting again. One—it was Mitchell, a well-known labor leader—exposed in force, low tones with Lord Redcar. I could not hear anything they said; I was not near enough. Behind me the gallery gates were open, and there was a sense of help coming to the motor car from that direction. There was an unoccupied, muddy space for fifty yards, perhaps, between car and gate, and then the wheels and head of the pit rose black against the sky. It was one of a rank semicircle of people that hung as yet indeterminate in action about the dispute.

It was natural, I suppose, that my fingers should close upon the revolver in my pocket.

I advanced with the urgent intentions in the world, and not so quickly but that several men hurried past me to join the little knot holding up the car.

Lord Redcar, in his big, hurry overcoat, turned up over the group about him, his gestures were free and threatening, and his voice loud. He made a fine figure there, I must admit; he was a big, fat, handsome young man with a fine tenor voice and an instinct for gallant effect. My eyes were drawn to him at first wholly. He seemed a symbol, a triumphant symbol, of all that the theory of aristocracy claimed, of all that filled my soul with resentment. His chauffeur sat crooked together, peering at the crowd under his lordship's arm. But Mitchell showed as a steady figure also, and his voice was firm and loud.

"You're hurt that bad," said Mitchell, over and over again. "You'll wait here till you see if he's hurt."

"I'll wait here or not as I please," said

Redcar; and to the chauffeur, "Here! get down and look at it!"

"You'd better not get down," said Mitchell, and the chauffeur stood bent and hesitating on the step.

The man on the bank just stood up, leaned forward, and spoke to Lord Redcar, and for the first time my attention was drawn to him. It was young Vennell. His handsome face shone clear and fair in the green pallor of the comet.

I ceased to hear the quarrel that was raising the voices of Mitchell and Lord Redcar. This new fact sent them spinning into the background. Young Vennell?

It was my own purpose coming to meet me halfway.

There was to be a fight here; it seemed certain to come to a scuffle, and here we were—

What was I to do? I thought very rapidly. Unless my memory cheats me, I acted with swift decision. My hand tightened on my revolver, and then I remembered it was unloaded. I had thought my course set in an instant. I turned round and pushed my way out of the angry crowd that was now surging back toward the motor car.

It would be quiet and out of sight, I thought, among the damp hedges across the road, and there I might load undisturbed.

A big young man, leaning forward with his arms clasped, waited for one second at the sight of me.

"What?" said he. "Ain't afraid of them, are you?"

I glanced over my shoulder and back at him, was near showing him my pistol, and the expression changed in his eyes. He hung perplexed at me. Then with a groan he went on—

I heard the voices growing loud and sharp behind me.

I hesitated, half turned toward the dispute, then set off running toward the hedge. Some instinct told me not to be diverted leading. I was cool enough, therefore, to think of the aftermath of the thing I meant to do.

I looked back once again toward the swaying discussion—or was it a fight now?—and then I dropped into a hollow, knoll among the weeds, and loaded with expert, trembling fingers. I loaded one chamber, got up and went back a dozen paces, thought of possibilities, ventilated, re-

turned, and looked all the other chambers. I did it slowly because I felt a little clumsy, and at the end came a moment of repose. Had I forgotten anything? And then, for a few seconds, I crooked before I rose, reciting the first gust of emotion against my impulse. I took thought, and for a moment, that great green-shade center overhead drew back into my consciousness. For the first time then, I linked it clearly with all the fierce violence that had crept into human life. I jerked up that with what I meant to do. I was going to shoot young Verrall under the beneficence of that green glare, as it were.

But along Nettie?

I found it impossible to think out that obvious complication.

I came up over the heap again, and walked slowly back toward the struggle.

Of course I had to kill him!

Now, I would have you believe I did not want to murder young Verrall at all at that particular time. I had not pictured such circumstances to them, I had never thought of him in connection with Lord Radnor and our black industrial world. He was in that distant other world of Chelchell, the world of parks and gardens, of warm winter sunsets and Nettie. His appearance here was disconcerting. I was taken by surprise. I was too tired and hungry to think clearly, and the hard application of our antagonism provided with me. In the tumult of my past emotions I had thought constantly of conflict, confrontations, deeds of violence, and now the memory of these things took possession of me as though they were accessible resolutions.

There was a sharp exclamation, the chink of a window, and the crowd came running back. The fight had begun.

Lord Radnor, I believe, had jumped down from his car and killed Stinchell, and men were already running out to his assistance from the colliery gates.

I had some difficulty in shooting through the crowd, I can still remember very vividly being jostled at one time between two big men so that my arms were pinned to my sides, but all the other details are gone out of my mind until I found myself almost violently projected forward into the "trap."

I stumbled against the corner of the motor car, and came round it face to face with young Verrall, who was descending from the back compartment. His face

was touched with orange from the automobile's big lamps, which conflicted with the shadows of the street lights, and elicited him oddly. That effect lasted but an instant, but it put me out. Then he came a step forward, and the ruddy lights and the greenness vanished.

I don't think he recognized me, but he perceived immediately that I meant attacking. He struck out at once at me a high-shouldered blow, and touched me on the cheek.

Instinctively I let go of the pistol, snatched my right hand out of my pocket and brought it up in a halting parry, and then let out with my left fist on his chest.

It sent him staggering, and as he went back I saw recognition ring in the astonishment in his face.

"You know me, you swine," I cried, and hit again.

Then I was spinning sideways, half stunned, with a huge lump of a fist under my jaw. I had an impression of Lord Radnor as a great, burly bulk, towering like some Homeric hero above the fray. I went down before him; it made him seem to rush up, and he ignored me further. His big fist soon昏迷young Verrall.

"Out, Teddy! It won't do. The pickets' got you back."

But they'd got about me, and those hulking ruffians locked my ankles and went sprawling. There were shouts and curses, and then everything had swept past me. I rolled over on my face, and heard the chubfest, young Verrall, and Lord Radnor—the latter adding up his long skirts of fur, and making a grotesque figure—one behind the other, in full bolt across a coldly constituted interval, toward the open gates of the colliery.

I raised myself up on my hands.

Young Verrall!

My spurs! I had forgotten it. I was covered with costly mud, knees, elbows, shoulders, back. And I had not even drawn my revolver!

A feeling of ridiculous impatience overwhelmed me. I struggled painfully to my feet.

I hesitated for a moment toward the gates of the colliery, and then went limping forward, shrewd, painful, confused, and ashamed. I had not the heart or desire to help in the wrecking and burning of Lord Radnor's motor.

(To be continued)



In the Days of the Comet

BY H. G. WELLS

BOOK THE FIRST—THE COMET

CHAPTER THE THIRD—THE ASTROLOGE—(CONTINUED)

NARRATOR. The narrative tells the story of the Comet Changer. When a young man he was a clerk in a post office in Clerkenwell. He is reduced as postman to wages and gives up his position. His ambling Friend, Puffin, a man of his own age, is a meteorite, who has, besides, a taste for science and is deeply interested about a comet whose path is approaching the earth's orbit. Why ought we to think about extinction, he inquires, when there is a probability that the comet will hit the earth? This has now been realized, on account of overpopulation and the invasion of American products in the English market. Britain and Ireland have, during long, the contrary. The narrator had been engaged in many foreign wars, but the engagement has been broken on account of his accident and his long disuse. He is disengaged because of a suspicion that Ireland, the usual Boer's employer, is paying the great assassin. Offering some virgin impulse, he loses a brother. Tragedy breaks out in the colonies caused by Lord Rother, whose masterpiece is destroyed by the mob. The narrator witnesses the affair and goes home in a greatly excited condition.

IV

IN the night, fever, pain, fatigue—a man may have been the unregional of my supper of bread and cheese—roused me out of a long slumber to face despair. I was a wretched man, dispirited and disconsolate, chilly, trembled, hopeless. I raged against the God I despised, and cursed him as I lay.

And it was in the nature of my fever, which was indeed only half fatigue and ill-

ness, and the rest the fever of passionate youth, that Nelly, a strangely distorted Nelly, should come through the brief dreams that marked the exhaustion of that visit, to dominate my morn. I was sensible, with an exaggerated distinctness, of the intensity of her physical charm for me, of her every grace and beauty; the look to herself the whole grand of desire in me and the whole grand of pride. She, hitherto, was my last honor. It was not only last but dearest to lose her, the needful for life and all that was dearest, she mocked me as a curios of failure and defeat.



Drawn by Robert Loomis

I NEVER SAW SUCH WEEPING.

There were times when something near madness took me, and I gnashed my teeth and dug my nails into my hands and caused to curse and cry out only by reason of the insufficiency of words. And once, turned down, I got out of bed, and sat by my looking-glass with my loaded revolver in my hand. I stood up at last and put it carefully in my drawer and locked it—out of reach of any gusty impulse. After that I slept for a little while.

Such nights were nothing rare and strange in that old order of the world. Never a city, never a night the whole year round, but amidst those who slept were those who walked, plauding the steps of wrath and misery. Countless thousands there were still, so troubled, they agonized next to the very border line of madness, each one the center of a universe darkened and lost.

The next day I spent in gloomy leisure. I had intended to go to Chekhov Hill that day, but my leased studio was too swollen for that to be possible. I sat indoors in the little downyish kitchen, with my foot bandaged, and stared darkly and read. My dear old mother waited on me, and her brown eyes watched me and wondered at my black silence, my drowning preoccupations. I had not told her how it was my studio came to be besieged and my clothes mostly. She had brushed my clothes in the morning before I got up.

Ah well! Mothers are not treated in that way now. That, I suppose, must console me. I wonder how far we will be able to picture that dark, grimy, smoky room, with its bare dead table, its stained wall paper, the snatches and knots on the sarcos, choky, but by no means, economical mugs, the sides under the fireplace, the rust-spotted steel ledger on which my bandaged feet rested, I wonder how near you can come to seeing the wretched, pale-faced hibiscus-like I was, aches and colllers, in the Windsor chair, and the little timid, dilly, dovelled old woman who hovered about me with her poring out from her puckered eyelids.

When she went out to buy some vegetables in the middle of the morning she got me a half-penny journal. It was just such a one as these upon my desk, only that the copy I read was damp from the press, and those are so dry and brittle they crack if I touch them. I have a copy of the actual issue I read that morning; it was a paper

called emphatically the "New Paper," but everybody bought it and everybody called it the "yellow." It was full that morning of stupendous news, and still more stupendous headlines, so stupendous that for a little while I was scared from my spiritual brooding to wider interests, for it seemed that Germany and England were on the brink of war.

Of all the most recent, typical phenomena of the former time, war was certainly the most strikingly usual. In reality, it was probably far less melancholy than such queer evils as, for example, the general acquiescence in the private ownership of land, but its cold consequence shone so plainly that even in those days of willing confusion one marvelled at it. On no conceivable ground was there any sense in modern war. Save for the slaying and mangling of a multitude of people, the destruction of vast quantities of material, and the waste of incalculable units of energy, it effected nothing. The old war of savagery and barbaric nations did, at least, change humanity. You assumed yourselves to be a superior tribe in physique and discipline, you demonstrated this upon your neighbour, and, if successful, you took their land and their women and perpetrated and enlarged your superiority.

The new war changed nothing but the color of maps, the design of postage stamps, and the relationship of a few accidentally conspicuous individuals. In one of the first of these retro-tactical epistles, for example, the English, with much division and bad poetry, and a few hundred deaths in battle, conquered the South African Boers at a gross cost of about three thousand pounds per head. They could have bought the whole of that preposterous imitation of a nation for a tenth of that sum, and except for a few substitutions of personalities, this group of partially corrupt officials in the place of that, and so forth, the present change was altogether insignificant. (But an exorbitant young man in Austria commanded vessels when at length the Transvaal ceased to be a "nation.") Men went through the rest of that war after it was all over, and found humanity unchanged, except for a general improvement, and the convenience of an unbroken supply of empty nitro-tin cans and berried wire and cartridge over-exchanged and



Illustration by Robert Doremus

THE WORD UPON IT—THERE WAS BUT ONE WORD UPON IT IN STARKING LETTERS—WAR,
“WAR.”

revering, with a slight perplexity, all his old habits and understandings, the vigor still in his sham-like form, the white in his ugly, ill-managed hair.

But we in England saw all these things, or did not see them, through the mists of the "New Paper" in a flight of rapture. All my adolescence, from fourteen to seventeen, went to the music of that numerous reciting, bawling, the cheering, the anathemas, the songs, and the saving of flags, the wrongs of the generous Buller and the glorious heroes of De Wet—who always got away; that was the great point about the heroic De Wet—and a never ceasing to us that the total population we fought against was less than half the number of those who lived cramped, ignoble lives within the compass of the Four Towns.

But before and after that stupid conflict of stupidities, a greater antagonism was coming into being, was slowly and quietly developing itself to a thing inevitable, taking now a little out of attention only to resume more emphatically, now, flashing into same acute, definitive expression, and now penetrating and percolating some new region of thought, and that was the antagonism of Germany and Great Britain.

How were we British, forty-one millions of people, in a state of almost indescribable ardor, courage, and moral muscle that we had neither the courage, the energy, nor the intelligence to impress. Most of us had hardly the courage to think about it and our affairs were hopelessly entangled with the entirely different collision of three hundred and fifty million other persons scattered about the globe. And here were the Germans over against us, fifty-six millions, in a state of confusion no whit better than our own. The tiny little creatures who dabbled papers and wrote books and gave lectures, generally in that time of world-dreams, pretended to be the national chief. They were busy in both countries, with a sort of internal unanimity, exhorting—and not only exhorting, but successfully persuading,—the two peoples to divert such small, common store of material, moral and intellectual energy as either possessed, into the purely destructive and wanton business of war. And—I have to tell you these things even if you do not believe them, because they are vital to my story—there was not a man alive who could have told you of any real,

permanent benefit, of anything whatever to countervail the obvious waste and evil, that would result from a war between England and Germany, whether England shattered Germany or was smashed and countervailed, or whatever the end might be.

The thing was, in fact, an enormous irrational obsession; it was in the subconscious of our nation, curiously parallel to the egotistical wrath and jealousy that warped my individual thoughts. It measured the excess of common emotion over the common intelligence, the legacy of irredentist passions we have received from the house from which we came. Just as I had become the slave of my own surprise and anger, and went bitter and thicker with a loaded revolver, seeking and meaning vague, fluctuating critics, so these two nations, sent about the earth, hot-tempered and middle-headed, with loaded rapiers and sabres terribly ready at hand. Only, there was not even a Nelly to justify their stupidity. There was nothing but quite imaginary thwarting on either side.

And the press was the chief instrument that kept these two huge multitudes of people directed against each other.

The press—those newspapers that are now so strange to us—like the "Empire," the "Nation," the "Truth," and all the other great numerous shapes of that extraordinary time—was in the nature of an assassinated accident. It had happened, as weeds happen in abandoned gardens, just as all our world had happened, because there was no clear Will in the world to bring about anything better. Toward the end this "press" was almost entirely under the direction of youngish men of that eager, rather unintelligent type, that is never able to detect itself visibly, that person ranks with incredible pride and smug. If you would really understand this mad era, the comet brought to an end, you must keep in mind that every phase in the production of these queer old things was presided by a strong, simple, strong and happened in a concentrated rush.

Let me describe to you, very briefly, a newspaper day.

Figure first, then, a hastily erected, and still more hastily designed, building in a dirty, paper-thatched back corner of old London, and a number of shabbily dressed men coming and going in this with precipitate wellness. Within this hothouse, com-

peals of police, toady active with nimble fingers—they were always speeding up the printers—ply their typesetting machines, and cast and arrange masses of metal in a sort of kitchen universe, above which, in a bedizen of little, bright, flares, dimmed men sit and scribble. There is a shrillong of telephones, and a clinking of telegraph instruments, a rattle of messages, a running in and out of heated men, clutching proofs and copy. Then begins a race of machinery, catching the infection, going faster and faster, and whizzing and banging. Engineers, who have never had time to wash since their birth, fly about with oil cans, while paper rains off its rolls with a shower of haze. The propulsive you must suppose arming explosively on a swift motor car, leaping out before the thing is at a standstill, with letters and documents clutched in his hand, rushing in, resolve to "hasten," getting wonderfully in everybody's way. At the sight of him even the messenger boys who are walking, get up and scuttle to and fro. Sprinkle your vision with collisions, curses, incivilities. You imagine all the parts of this complex, lunatic machine working hyseronically toward a crescendo of basic and elemental as the night wears on. At last, the only things that seem to move slowly in all these tearing, vibrating processes, are the hands of the clock.

Slowly things drew on toward publication, the consummation of all these stresses. Then, in the small hours, into the new dark and deserted streets comes a wild whirl of carts and men, the place spouts paper at every door; books, bibles, bundles of papers, that are snatched and flung about in what looks like a free fight, and off with a rush and clatter east, west, north and south. The intense peace outwardly, the men from the little rooms are going hitherward, the printers disperse, pausing, the roaring presses slacken. The paper comes. Distribution follows manufacture, and we follow the bundles.

Our vision becomes a vision of dispersal. You see these bundles hurling into stations, catching trains by a hair's breadth, speeding on their way, breaking up, smaller bundles of them hauled with a fierce accuracy out upon the platforms that dash by, and then everywhere a division of these smaller bundles into still smaller bundles,

into dispersing parcels, into separate papers. The down happens unceasing amidst a great running and shouting of boys, a shoving through letter-slots, openings of windows, spreading out upon book-shelfs. For the space of a few hours, you must figure the whole country dotted white with flying papers. Pictures everywhere, verily the burned is for the day. Men and women in trains, men and women eating and reading, men by study-fenders, people sitting up in bed, mothers and sons and daughters waiting for father to finish—a million scattered people are reading—reading headlong—or feverishly ready to read. It is just as if some vehement jet had sprayed that white juice of papers over the surface of the land.

Nonsense! The whole affair a noisy paroxysm of nonsense, unreasoning excitement, wildness, maddest, and waste of strength—signifying nothing.

And one of these white particles was the paper I held in my hands, as I sat with a bandaged foot on the steel ladder in that dark, underground kitchen of my mother's, clean raised from my personal trouble by the yelp of the headlines. She sat, sleeves tucked up from her ruddy arms, perking potions as I read.

The comet had been driven into obscurity overland. The column headed, "Distinguished Scientist says Comet will strike our Earth. Does it Matter?" went unread. "Germany"—I usually figured this impudent, malignant creature as a noseless, stiff-muscled impaper enhanced by bony black wings and a large sword—had insulted our flag. That was the message of the "New Paper" and the monster roared over me, threatening death on me, verily springing upon my little country's colors. Somebody had hoisted a British flag on the right bank of some tropical river I had never heard of before, and a drunken German officer, under ambiguous instructions, had torn it down. Then one of the convenient, short-sighted natives of the country, a British subject indisputably, had been shot in the leg. But the facts were by no means clear. Nothing was clear, except that we were not going to stand any nonsense from Germany. Whatever had, or had not, happened we meant to have an apology for, and apparently they did not mean apologizing.

"HAS WAR COME AT LAST?"

That was the headline. One's heart leaped to answer.

There were hours that day, when I clean forgot Nettie, in dreams of battles and victories by land and sea, of shell fire, and entrenchments, and the heaped slaughter of many thousands of men.

But the next morning I started for Cheshfield, started, I remember, in a curiously hopeful state of mind, oblivious of comets, strikes and wars.

V

You must understand that I had no set plan of murder when I walked over to Cheshfield. I had no set plan of any sort. There was a great confusion of dramatically conceived intentions in my head, scenes of threatening and destruction and terror, but I did not mean to kill. The revolver was to turn upon my rival my disadvantage in age and physique. But that wasn't it really! The revolver—I took the revolver because I had the revolver and was a foolish young fool. It was a dramatic sort of thing to take. I had, I say, no plan at all.

Evened again during that second trudge to Cheshfield, I was annihilated with a need, unreasonable hope. I had awakened in the morning with the hope—it may have been the last, unlived trial of some obdurate dream—that, after all, Nettie might still relent toward me, that her heart was kind toward me in spite of all that I imagined had happened. I even thought it possible that I might have misinterpreted what I had seen. Perhaps she would explain everything. My revolver was in my pocket for all that.

I stepped at the outset, but after the second mile, my will wavered to forgetfulness, and the rest of the way I walked well. Suppose, after all, I was wrong?

I was still debating that as I came through the park. By the corner of the paddock near the keeper's cottage, I was reminded, by some belated blue hydrangeas, of a time when Nettie and I had gathered them together. It seemed impossible we could really have parted ourselves for good and all. A wave of tenderness flooded me as I

came through the little dell and down toward the hollow. But there the sweet Nettie of my boy's love faded, and I thought of the new Nettie of desire, and the will I had come upon in the moonlight. I thought of the narrow, hot purpose that had grown so strongly out of my springtime freshness, and my mood darkened to rage.

I crossed the beech wood and came toward the garden with a resolute and powerful heart. When I reached the green door in the garden wall, I was seized, for a space, with so violent a trembling, that I could not get the latch to fit it, for I no longer had any doubt how this would end.

Through the open door of one of the gables, I saw old Smart. He was leaning against the stinging, his hands in his pockets, and so deep in thought he gave no heed to me.

I hesitated, and went on toward the cottage, slowly.

Something struck me as unusual about the place, but I could not tell at first what it was. One of the bedroom windows was open, and the customary short blind, with its loose upper rail partly unlatched, drooped idly across the vacant space. It looked negligent and odd, for usually everything about the cottage was conspicuously trim.

The door was standing wide open, and everything was still, but giving that usually orderly hall an odd look—it was about half-past two in the afternoon—was a pile of three dirty plates, with used knives and forks upon them, on one of the hall chairs.

I went into the hall, looked into other rooms, and hesitated.

Then I fell to open the door-knocker and gave a loud *knock-knock*, and followed that up with an available, "Hello!"

For a time no one answered me, and I stood listening and expectant, with my finger about my weapon. Some one moved about upstairs presently, and was still again. The sense of waiting seemed to lacerate my nerves.

I had my hand on the knocker for the second time, when Fuss, Nettie's sister, appeared in the doorway.

For a moment we remained staring at each other without speaking. Her hair was disheveled, her face dirty, her stained, and irregularly red. Her expression at

the sight of me was pure astonishment. I thought she was about to say something, and then she had darted away out of the house again.

"I say, Pass!" I said. "Pass!"

I followed her out of the door. "Pass! What's the matter? Where's Nettie?"

She vanished round the corner of the house.

I hesitated, perplexed whether I should pursue her. What did it all mean? Then I heard some one upstairs.

"Willie!" cried the voice of Mrs. Stuart. "Is that you?"

"Yes," I answered. "Where's everyone? Where's Nettie? I want to have a talk with her."

She did not answer, but I heard her steps resile as she moved. I judged she was upon the landing-stairhead.

I paused at the foot of the stairs, expecting her to appear and come down.

Suddenly came a strange sound, a rush of sounds, much jumbled and harrumphed, confused and shapeless, borne along upon a note of thready distress that at last submersed the words altogether and ended in a wail. Except that it came from a woman's throat it was exactly the bethinking sound of a weeping child with a grievance. "I can't," she said, "I can't," and that was all I could distinguish. It was to my young ear the strongest sound conceivable from a kindly, motherly little woman, whom I had always thought of chiefly as an unparalleled maker of cakes. It frightened me. I went upstairs at once in a state of infinite alarm, and there she was in her room, leaning on the top of a bureau. I never saw such weeping.

As I came into the bedroom her voice rose again. "Oh that I should have to tell you, Willie! Oh that I should have to tell you!" She dropped her head again, and a fresh gust of tears swept all further words away.

I said nothing, I was too astonished; but I drew nearer to her, and waited.

"That I should have lived to see this day!" she wailed. "I had rather a thousand times she was struck dead at my feet."

I began to understand.

"Mrs. Stuart," I said, clearing my throat; "what has become of Nettie?"

"That I should have lived to see this day!" she said by way of reply.

I waited till her passion abated.

There came a half. I forgot the weapon in my pocket. I said nothing, and suddenly she stood erect before me, wiping her swollen eyes. "Willie," she gulped, "she's gone!"

"Nettie?"

"Gone! Ran away! Ran away from her home. Oh, Willie, Willie! The shame of it! The sin and shame of it!"

She flung herself upon my shoulder, and clung to me, and began again to wish her daughter lying dead in our bier.

"There, there," said I, and all my being was a tremble. "Where has she gone?" I said as softly as I could.

But for the time she was preoccupied with her own sorrow, and I had to hold her there, and comfort her with the blackness of finality spreading over my soul.

"Where has she gone?" I asked for the fourth time.

"I don't know—we don't know. And oh, Willie, she went out yesterday evening—I said to her, 'Nettie,' I said to her, 'you're mighty fine for a morning call.' 'This do's for a fine day,' she said, and that was her last words to me!—Willie!—the child I suckled at my bosom!"

She went on with sob, and now telling her story with a sort of fragmentary hurry. "She went out bright and shining, out of this house forever. She was *smiling*, Willie—at if she was glad to be going. ("Glad to be going," I echoed with sombre lips.) "You're mighty fine for the morning," I say, "mighty fine." "Let the girl be pretty," says her father, "while she's young." And somewhere she'd got a parcel of her things hidden to pick up, and she was going off—out of this house forever!"

She became quiet.

"Let the girl be pretty," she repeated. "Let the girl be pretty while she's young. Oh! how can we go on living, Willie? He doesn't show it, but he's like a stricken beast. He's wounded to the heart. She was always his favorite. He never seemed to care for Pass like he did for her. And that wounded him——"

"Where has she gone?" I reverted at last to that.

"We don't know. She leaves her own blood, she leaves herself—oh, Willie, it'll kill me! I wish she and me together were lying in our graves."

"But"—I restrained my lips and spoke slowly, "she may have gone to marry."

"If that was so! I've prayed to God it might be so, Wilkie. I've prayed that he'd take pity on her—him, I mean, she's with." I jerked out, "What's that?"

"In her letter, she said he was a gentleman. She did say he was a gentleman."

"In her letter. Has she written? Can I see her letter?"

"Her father took it."

"Has if she wrote—When did she write?"

"It came this morning."

"But where did it come from? You can tell—"

"She didn't say. She said she was happy. She said love took one like a storm—"

"Come that! Where is her letter? Let me see it. And as for this gentleman—"

He stared at me.

"You know who it is."

"Wilkie!" she protested.

"You know who it is, whether she said or not."

Her eyes made a man, unconfident smile.

"Young Verrall?"

She made no answer. "All I could do for you, Wilkie," she began presently.

"Was it young Verrall?" I insisted.

For a second, perhaps, we lived each other in such understanding. Then she plunged back to the bushes, and her wet handkerchief, and I knew she sought refuge from my relentless eyes.

My pity for her vanished. She knew it was her mistress' son as well as I. And for some time she had known, she had left.

I hovered over her for a moment, sick with amazed disgust. Then I suddenly thought of old Stuart, out in the greenhouse, and turned and went downstairs.

VI

Old Stuart was pitiful.

I found him still bent in the greenhouse where I had first seen him. He did not move as I drew near him; he glistened at me, and then stared hard again at the flowers before him.

"Ah, Wilkie," he said, "this is a black day for all of us."

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"The master takes care of us," he said. "I name not here."

"What do you mean to do?"

"What is a man to do in such a case?"

"Tell!" I cried, "why—tell!"

"He ought to marry her," he said.

"By God, yes!" I cried. "He must do that anywhere!"

"He ought to. It's a crook. But what am I to do? Suppose he won't? Likely he won't. What then?"

He drooped with an intimated despair.

"Here's this cottage," he said, putting some contracted argument. "We've lived here all our lives, you might say. Clear out? At my age? One can't die in a chaff."

I stood before him for a space, speculating what thoughts might fill the gaps between those broken words. I found his language, and the dimly shaped mental attitude his words indicated, a terrible. I said abruptly, "You have her letter?"

He dived into his breast pocket, became motionless for ten seconds, then woke up again and produced her letter. He drew it颤颤 from its envelope, and handed it to me silently.

It was written on greenish-tinted, lacey newspaper, and with all and more than Setters usual smugness and inadequacy of expression. Her handwriting bore no traces of emotion, it was round and upright and clear as though it had been done in a writing lesson. Always her letters were like seals upon her image; they fill the curtains before the changing charms of her face. One altogether forgot the sound of her light clear voice, continued by a perplexing, stereotyped thing that had mysteriously got a hold upon one's heart and pride. How did that letter run?

"My Dear Moppet:

"We can not be separated at any price now. I have gone somewhere safe, and with someone who cares for me very much. I am sorry for your sake, but it seems that it had to be. Love is a very difficult thing, and takes hold of one in ways one does not expect. Do not think I am ashamed about that. I glory in my love, and you must not trouble too much about me. I am very, very happy."

"Fondest love to Fisher and Penn.

"Your forever,
Moppet."

That queer little document! I can see it now for the childlike, simple thing it was, but at the time, I read it in a suppressed

English of rage. It plunged me into a pit of hopeless shame; there seemed to remain no pride for me in life until I had revenge. I stood silent at those rounded, upstanding features, not trusting myself to speak or move. At last I stole a glance at Stuart.

"You can't even tell where she is," he said, turning the envelope in a hopeless manner, and then desiring. "It's hard on me, Willis. Here she is; she hasn't anything to complain of, a sort of pet for all of us. Not even made to do her share of the housework. And she goes off and leaves us like a bird that's learnt to fly. Can't trust her, that's what she's like. Petts 'would'—But there! What's to happen to her?"

"What's to happen to him?"

He shook his head to show that problem was beyond him.

"You'll go after her," I said in an even voice, "you'll make him marry her!"

"Where am I to go?" he asked helplessly, and held out the envelope with a gesture, "and what could I do? Even if I knew—How could I know the gardens?"

"Great God!" I cried, "not know these gardens! It's your house, man! If she was my daughter—if she was my daughter—I'd tear the world to pieces!" I choked. "You mean to stand it?"

"What can I do?"

"Make him marry her! Husbandship has! Husbandship has, I say! I'd strangle him!"

He scratched slowly at his hairy cheek, opened his mouth, and shook his head. Then, with an intolerable note of shaggish, gentle widow, he said, "People of our sort, Willis, don't do things like that."

I came near to crying. I had a wild impulse to strike him in the face. Once in my boyhood, I happened upon a bird terribly mangled by some cat, and killed it in a frenzy of horror and pity. I had a gust of that same emotion now, at the shrouched, muffled soul flattered in the dust, before me. Then, you know, I dismissed him from the case.

"May I look?" I asked.

He held out the envelope reluctantly.

"There it is," he said, and pointing with his garden-rough forefinger. "I.A.P.A. M.P. What do you make of that?"

I took the thing in my hands. The adhesives, strong customary in those days, was indicated by a circular postmark, which bore the name of the office of departure and the

date. The imprint in this particular case had been light or made without sufficient ink, and half the letters of the name had left no impression. I could distinguish—

I.A.P. A.M.P.

and very faintly below, D.S.O.

I guessed the name in an instant flash of intuition. It was *Stanhopebury*. The very gaps shaped that to my mind. Perhaps, in a sort of semi-virility, other letters were there, at least blurring themselves. It was a place somewhere on the east coast, I knew, either in Norfolk or Suffolk.

"Why!" cried I—and stopped.

What was the good of telling her?

Old Stuart had glanced up sharply. I am inclined to think almost frantically, into my face. "You—you haven't got it?" he said.

Stanhopebury—I should remember that. "You don't think you got it?" he said.

I handed the envelope back to him.

He replaced the letter in it and stood erect to put this back in his breast pocket.

I did not mean to take any risks in this affair. I drew a stamp of post from my waistcoat pocket, turned a little away from him and wrote "Stanhopebury" very quickly on my hand and rather grimly off. "Well," said I, with music of having done nothing remarkable.

I turned to him with some unimportant observation—I have forgotten what.

I never finished whatever vague remark I commenced.

I looked up to see a third person waiting at the greenhouse door.

VII

It was old Mrs. Verrall.

I wonder if I can convey the effect of her to you. She was a little old lady with extraordinarily thin hair. Her weak, aquiline features were pinched up into an assumption of dignity, and she was richly dressed. I would like to underline that "richly dressed," or have the word printed in bold old English or Gothic lettering. No one on earth is now quite so richly dressed as she was, no one, old or young, indulges in so queer and yet so professed a conspicuity. But you must not imagine any extravagance of colour or any beauty or richness of colour. The predominant colours were black and far-brown, and the effect of richness was due entirely to the ex-

unseen confidante of the materials employed. She affected silk brocades with rich and elaborate patterns, gaudy black lace over creamy or purple satin, intricate tracings through which threads and bands of velvet wriggled, and in the winter, rare furs. Her gloves fitted exquisitely, and ostentatiously simple chains of fine gold and pearls, and a great number of bracelets, hung about her little person. One was forced to feel that the slightest article she wore cost more than all the wardrobes of a dozen girls like May, for honest affected the simplicity that is beyond rules. Richness, that is the first quality about this old lady that I would like to convey to you, and the second was cleanliness. You felt that old Mrs. Vermill was exquisitely clean. If you had boiled my poor, dear old mother in soot for a month you couldn't have got her so clean as Mrs. Vermill constantly and manifestly was. And, pervading all her presence, shone her third great quality, her manifest confidence in the respectful subordination of the world.

She was pale and a little out of breath that day, but without any loss of her infinite confidence. It was clear to me that she had come to interview Stuart upon the outbreak of passion that had bridged the gulf between their families.

And here, again, I find myself writing in an unknown language, so far as my younger readers are concerned. You who know only the world that followed the *Coast Charge* will find much that I am writing incomprehensible. Upon these points I cannot appeal, as I have appealed for other confirmations, in the old newspapers; these were the things that no one wrote about because every one understood and every one had taken up an attitude.

There were in England and America, and indeed throughout the world, two great informal divisions of human beings—the Secure and the Insecure. There was not and never had been in either country a nobility *qui vive*, and remains, a common error that the British peers were noble. Neither in law nor custom were there noble families; and we altogether lacked the education one found in Russia, for example, of a peer nobility. A peerage was an hereditary possession that, like the family land, concerned only the oldest son of a house; it indicated no later of nobility abhorr. The rest of the world were in law and practice common-

and all America was common. But through the private ownership of land that had resulted from the neglect of feudal obligations in Britain, and the utter want of political foresight in the Americas, large masses of property had become artificially stable in the hands of a small minority, to whom it was necessary to mortgage all new public and private enterprise, and who were held together, not by any tradition of service and nobility, but the natural sympathy of common interests and a common large scale of living.

It was a class without any very definite boundaries. Vigorous individualities, by methods, for the most part, violent and questionable, were constantly thrusting themselves from insecurity to security, and the sons and daughters of secure people, by marrying insecurity or by wild extravagance or flagrant vice, would sink into the life of anxiety and insufficiency which was the ordinary life of men. The rest of the population was hopeless, and except by working directly or indirectly for the Secure, had no legal right to exist. And such was the shallowness and insufficiency of our thought, such the stifled emotion of all our feelings, before the Last Days, that very few, indeed, of the Secure could be found to doubt that this was the natural and only conceivable order of the world.

It is the life of the Insecure under the old order that I am displaying, and I hope that I am conveying something of its hopeless bitterness to you, but you must not imagine that the Secure lived lives of paraded happiness. The pit of insecurity below them made itself felt, even though it was not comprehended. Life about them was ugly; the sight of ugly and mean houses, of ill-dressed people, the vulgar appeals of the dealers in popular commodities, were not to be escaped. There was below the threshold of their minds an uneasiness, they not only did not think clearly about social economy but they displayed an instinctive distaste to think. Their security was not so perfect that they had not a dread of falling toward the pit. They were always hastening themselves by new rope, their cultivation of "connections," of interests, their desire to expand and improve their positions, was a constant ignoble preoccupation. You must read Thackeray to get the full flavor of their lives.

Then the bacterium was apt to disregard

class distinctions, and they were never really happy in their servants. Read their surviving books. Each generation breeds the decay of that "fidelity" of servants, no generation ever sure. A world that is equalled in one corner is equalled altogether, but that they never understood. They believed there was not enough of anything to go round, they believed that this was the intention of God and an incurable condition of life, and they held passionately and with a sense of right, to their disproportionate share. They maintained a certain indifference as "Society" of all who were practically secure, and their sense of that word is exhaustively eloquent of the quality of their philosophy.

But, if you can master those other ideas upon which the old system rested, just in the same measure will you understand the horror these people had for marriage with the lower-class. In the case of their girls and women it was extraordinarily true, and in the case of either sex it was regarded as a disastrous social crime. Anything was better than that.

You are probably aware of the hideous fate that was only too probably the lot, during those hot dark days, of every girl of the inferior classes who lived and gave way to the impulse of self-abandonment without marriage, and so you will understand the peculiar situation of Netta with young Verrell. One or the other had to suffer. And as they were both in a state of great emotional exhaustion and capable of strange passions toward each other, it was an open question and naturally a source of great anxiety to a mother as Mrs. Verrell's position, whether the sufferer might not be her son—whether as the outcome of that glowing, irresponsible summer, Netta might not return prospective mistress of Checkahill Towers. The chances were greatly against that conclusion, but such things did occur.

These laws and customs passed, I know, like a record of some many-edited human's intentions. They were invincible laws in the vanished world into which, by some accident, I had been born, and it was the dream of any better state of things that was scouted as luxury. Just think of it! This girl I loved with all my soul, for whom I was ready to sacrifice my life, was not good enough to marry young Verrell. And I had only to look at his eyes, handsome, characteristic face to perceive a creature weaker

and no better than myself. She was to be his pleasure until he chose to cast her aside and the poison of our social system had saturated her nature—he avenging chess, his freedom and his money had seemed as fine to her and I so clothed in splendor—that to that prospect she had consented. And to prevent the social convulsions that created their division, was called "class envy," and gently born peasants reproached us for the robust resentment against us. Injustice no living man would now either endure or consent to profit by.

What was the sense of saying "peace" when there was no peace? If there was no hope in the dissolution of that old world it lay in revolution and conflict to the death.

But if you can really grasp the shameful grossnesses of the old life, you will begin to appreciate the interpretation of old Mrs. Verrell's appearance that leaped up at once in my mind.

She had come to compromise the dispute!

And the Stuarts would compromise? I saw that only too well!

An enormous disgust at the prospect of the imminent encounter between Stuart and his relatives made me believe in a violent and irrational way. I wanted to escape seeing that, seeing even Stuart's first gesture in that, at any cost.

"I'm off," said I, and turned my back on him without any further farewell.

My face of refusal lay by the old lady, and so I advanced toward her.

I saw her anxious change, her mouth fell a little way open, her forehead wrinkled, and her eyes grew round. She found me a queer customer even at the first sight, and there was something in the manner of my advance that took away her breath.

She stood at the top of the three or four steps that descended to the level of the boathouse floor. She needed a pace or two, with a certain offended dignity at the determination of my rank.

I gave her no sort of salutation.

Well, as a matter of fact, I did give her a sort of salutation. There is no occasion for me to begin apologizing now for the thing I said to her—I strip these things before you—and only I can get them stark enough you will understand and forgive. I was filled with a brutal and overpowering desire to insult her.

And so I addressed this poor, little, an-

pensive, old woman in the following terms, converting her by a violent metamorphosis into a comprehensive plural. "You infernal herd thieves!" I said pant-blank into her face, "Have you *seen* it off these many?"

And without waiting to test her power of repartee, I passed rapidly beyond her and vanished, driving with my fist clenched out of her world again.

I have tried since to imagine how the thing must have looked to her. So far as her particular universe went I had not existed at all, or I had existed only as a dim, black thing, an inglorious speck, far away across her park or undercoat, unimportant trumper, until the moment when she came, suddenly troubled, into her own secret gardens and sought for *Scout* among the greenhouses. Then, abruptly, I flashed into being down that green walk, black-clad like a black-clad, ill-clad young man, who first started, and then advanced, growling, toward her. Once in existence I developed rapidly. I grew larger in perspective and became more and more important and shriller every moment. I came up the steps with inconceivable hostility and contempt in my bearing, towered over her, bellowing for an instant at least a sort of second *Fourth Revelation*, and delivered myself, with the intensest concentration, of those wicked and incomprehensible words:

Just for a second, I threatened annihilation. Happily that was my climax.

And then I had gone by, and the Universe was very much as it had always been except for the wild swirl out, and the faint sense of necessity, my episode left in its wake.

The thing that never entered my head in those days was that a large proportion of the rich were rich in absolute good faith. I thought they saw things exactly as I saw them, and wickedly desired that, indeed, old Mrs. Verrall was no more capable of doubting the perfections of her family's right to dominate a wide countyside, than the man of maintaining the Thirtysix Articles or dealing with any other of the adamantine pillars upon which her universe rested in security.

No doubt I snarled and frightened her immensely, that she could not understand.

None of her sort of people ever did seem to understand such brief flashes of fury, as ever and again lit the crowded darkness before their eyes. The thing bengalized out of the black for a moment and vanished, like a threatening figure by a desolate roadside, lit for a moment by one's belated carriage lamp and then swallowed up by the night. They shrank it with nightmares, and did their best to forget what was evidently as inglorious as it was disturbing.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH—*—was*

1

FROM that moment when I insulted old Mrs. Verrall I became representative, I was a man who stood for all the discredited of the world. I had no hope of pride or pleasure left in me, I was raging rebellion against God and mankind. There were no more vague intentions swaying me this way and that; I was perfectly clear now upon what I meant to do.

I would make my protest and die. I was going to kill Nettie—Nettie who had snarled and pounced and then given herself to another, and who stood now for all the conceivable delighfulnesses the lost imaginations of the youthful heart, the unattainable

joy in life; and Verrall, who stood for all who profited by the inexorable injustice of our social order. I would kill them both. And that being done, I would blow my brains out and see what vengeance followed my black refusal to live.

So indeed I was resolved. I sagged more steadily. And above me, shuddering the stars, atmosphere over the yellow, winking moon that followed in below, the great motor towered up toward the zenith.

"Let me only kill!" I cried. "Let me only kill!"

So I shouted in my frenzy. I was in a fever that dried hunger and fatigue, for a long time I peered over the heath toward Lewesbury talking to myself, and now that night had fully come, I was marching homeward, walking the long seventeen miles without a thought of rest. And I had eaten nothing since the morning.

I suppose I went over myself mad, but I can recall my ravings.

There were times when I walked weeping through that brightness that was neither night nor day. There were times when I measured in a topey-tarvy fashion with what I called the Spirit of All Things. But always I spoke to that white glory in the sky.

"Why am I here only to suffer ignominy?" I asked. "Why have you made me with pride that cannot be satisfied, with dreams that turn and mock me? Is it a jest, this world—a jest you play on your guests?—I—even I—have a better humor than that!"

"Why not learn from me a certain decency of misery? Why not undo? Here I ever tormented, day by day, some wretched soul, making this life to me mad through, till that disgusts it, starving it, bruising it, mocking it? Why should You? Your jokes are clumsy. Try—try some milder fun up there; do you hear? Something that doesn't hurt so internally."

"You say this is your purpose—your purpose with me. You are making something with me—birth pains of a soul! Ah! How can I believe you? You forget I have eyes for other things. Let my eyes now go, but what of that frog beneath the cart wheel, God?—and the bird the net has torn?"

And after such blasphemies I would fling out a ridiculous little debating society hard, "Answer me that!"

A week ago it had been moonlight, white and black and hard across the spaces of the park, but now the light was livid and full of the quality of haze. An extraordinarily low, white mist, not three feet above the ground, drifted howlingly across the grass, and the trees receded ghostly out of the phantom sea. Great and shadowy and strange was the world that night. No one seemed abroad; I used my little cracked voice-drilled soliloquy through the silent mysteries. Sometimes I argued as I have told, sometimes I trundled along in moody vacuity, sometimes my torment was vital and acute.

Abruptly, out of agathy, would come a boiling patroon of fury, when I thought of Nettie mocking me and laughing, and of her and Verrall clasped in each other's arms.

"I will not have it so!" I screamed. "I will not have it so!"

And in one of these ravings fits, I drew my revolver from my pocket and fired it into the quiet night. Three times I fired it.

The bullets iron through the air, the startled trees told me nothing in diminishing echoes the thing I had done, and then, with a slow fluidity, the vast and patient night healed again to calm. My shots, my curses and blasphemes, my prayers—for whom I pray—that silence took them all.

It was—how can I express it?—a stifled outcry tranquillized, lost, amid the same atmosphere, the overwhelming empire of that brightness. The noise of the shot, the impact upon things, had, for the instant, been enormous, then it had passed away. I found myself standing with the revolver held up, astonished; my emotions penetrated by something I could not understand. Then I looked up over my shoulder at the great star, and remained staring at it.

"Who are you?" I said at last.

I was like a man in a solitary desert who suddenly heard a voice.

That, too, passed.

As I came over Clayton Crest I recall that I raised the weightleth that morn, night after night, walked out to stare at the comet, and the little preacher in the waste beyond the boardings, who warned sinners to repent before the Judgment, was not in his usual place.

It was long past midnight, and every one had gone home. But I did not think of this at first, and the solitude purloined me and left a memory behind. The gas-lamps were all extinguished because of the brightness of the comet, and that, too, was unfamiliar. The little news agent in still High Street had shut up and gone to bed, but one belated board had been put out late and forgotten, and it still bore its placard.

The word upon it—there was but one word upon it in stony letters—was, "WAKE!"

You figure that empty, mean street, empty echoing to my footfalls, so cool and silent but me. Then my halt at the placard. And amidst that sleeping stillness, snarled hasty upon the board, a little askew and crumpled, but quite distinct beneath that cool, meteoric glass, patoisorous and appalling, the recurrerless end of that word—

"WAKE!"

II

I awoke in that state of equanimity that so often follows an emotional clutching.

It was late, and my mother was beside my bed. She had some breakfast for me on a battered tray.

"Don't get up yet, dear," she said. "You've been sleeping. It was three o'clock when you got home last night. You must have been tired out. Your poor face," she went on, "was as white as a sheet, and your eyes shining. It frightened me to let you in. And you stumbled on the stairs."

My eye went quickly to my coat pocket, where something still layed. She probably had not noticed. "I went to Chesham," I said. "You know—perhaps—?"

"I got a letter last evening, dear." She bent near me to put the tray upon my knees, and she kissed my hair softly. For a moment we both remained still, resting on that, her cheek just touching my head.

I took the tray from her and the paper.

"Don't touch my clothes, mamma," I said sharply, as she moved toward them. "I'm still equal to a clothesbrush."

And then, as she turned away, I addressed her by saying: "Your dear mother, you! A little—I understand. Only—now—dear mother; oh! let me bat! Let me bat!"

And, with the docility of a good servant, she went from me. Dear heart of subordination that the world and I had used so!

It seemed to me that morning that I could never give way to a gust of passion again. A tremendous firmness of mind possessed me. My purpose seemed now as inflexible as iron; there was neither love nor hate nor fear left in me—only I prized my mother greatly for all that was still to come. I ate my breakfast slowly, and thought where I could find out about Shapenbury, and how I might hope to get there. I had not the shillings in the world.

I dressed methodically, choosing the least frayed of my collars, and shaving much more carefully than was my wont, then I went down to the public library to consult a map.

Shapenbury was on the coast of Essex, a long and complicated journey from Chesham. I went to the railway station and made some computations from the timetables. The porters I asked were not very

clear about Shapenbury, but the booking-office clerk was helpful, and we passed out all I wanted to know. Then I came out into the coldly street again. At the least I ought to have two pounds.

I went back to the public library and into the newspaper room to think over this problem.

A fact intruded itself upon me. People seemed to be altogether exceptional stir about the morning journals. There was something unusual in the air of the room; more people and more talking than usual, and for a moment I was puzzled. Then I halfthought me, "This war with Germany, of course!" A naval battle was supposed to be in progress in the North Sea. Let them! I returned to the consideration of my own affairs.

Parkhead?

Could I go and make it up with him, and then borrow? I weighed the chances of that. Then I thought of selling or parting something, but that seemed difficult. My mother's pocket had not cost a penny when it was new; my watch was not likely to fetch many shillings. Still, both those things might be factors. I thought with a certain impatience of the little store my mother was probably making for the rest. She was very secretive about that, and it was locked in an old tea caddy in her bedroom. I knew it would be almost impossible to get any of that money from her willingly, and, though I told myself that in this issue of passion and death no detail mattered, I could not get rid of tormenting scruples whenever I thought of that tea caddy. Was there no other course? Perhaps, after every other source had been tapped, I might supplement with a few shillings thickly begged from her. "These others," I said to myself, thinking without passion for one of the sons of the house, "would find it difficult to run their resources on a parsonshop basis. However, we must manage it."

I felt the day was passing on, but I did not get excited about that. "Slow is difficult," Parkhead used to say, and I meant to get everything thought out completely, to take a long aim and then to act as a bullet then.

I hesitated at a pawnshop on my way home to my midday meal, but I determined not to pledge my watch until I could bring my overcoat also.

I ate silently, revolving plans.

(To be continued.)



Photo by Andrew Lichten

ONE WAITED FOR ITS BLOW, AND THEY EACH SIGHT IT CAME AS A SURPRISE

Line 17 of "In the Days of the Comet," page 107



In the Days of the Comet

BY H. G. WELLS

BOOK THE FIRST—THE COMET

CHAPTER THE FORTY-THREE—(continued)

SIXTY-ONE. The narrator, William Leadford, is telling of events at his porch before the Great Change. Through his friend Parfond he has become a socialist, and is also interested in a great comet whose path is approaching the earth's orbit. This fact is more important to him than the spread of socialism, for what will happen if the comet strikes the earth? Meanwhile, times are bad in England, owing to strikes, lockouts, over-production, and the invasion of American products in the market. And, besides, war has just broken out between England and Germany. Leadford has been engaged to marry Jessie Stuart, but she has broken with him on account of his beliefs. The young man still loves the girl and envisions her running away with him. He learns that she has eloped with Edward Vennell, the son of her father's employer. The couple have gone to a resort on the sea coast. Owing to some legal impediment, Leadford has secretly bought a revolver. The idea of following his sweetheart now comes to his mind, but to do this he will have to pawn some of his belongings.

III

FTER our midday dinner—it was a potato pie, mostly potato with some strips of cabbage and bacon—I put on my overcoat and got it out of the house while my mother was in the scullery at the back.

A scullery in the old world was, in the case of such houses as ours, a dark, unairy, mainly subterranean region behind the dark living-room kitchen. It was ren-

dered more than typically dirty in our case by the fact that into it the coal cellar, a yawning pit of black uncleanliness, opened, and diffused small, crustable particles about the unsooty brick floor. It was the region of "washing up," that greasy, damp function that followed every meal. Its atmosphere had over a cooking smelliness, and the memory of boiled cabbage, and the sooty, black stains where saucers or kettles had been put down for a moment, scraps of potato peel caught by the rim of an escape pipe, and rays of a quite indescribable horribleness of accretion, called "dishleous," are in my memory at the

house. The altar of this place was the "sink," a tank of stone, receding to a refined trough, grecian fluted and unpleasant to use. Above this was a tap for cold water, so arranged that when the water descended it splashed and wetted whoever had turned it on. This tap was our water supply. And in such a place you must fancy a little old woman, rather incompetent and very gentle, a soul of unselfishness and sacrifice, in dirty clothes, all worn from their original colors to a common dusty dark gray, in worn, ill-fitting bonnet, with hands distorted by ill use, and unkempt graying hair—my mother. In the winter her hands would be "chapped," and she would have a cough. And while she washed up I go out, to walk my street, and watch in order that I may desert her.

I forgot how much money I got, but I remember that it was rather less than the sum I had made out to be the single fare to Shapshirebury.

I got back home about five minutes to three, resolved to start by the five train for Herringham in my rose, but still dismasted about my money. I thought of passing a book or something of that sort, but I could think of nothing of obvious value in the house. My mother's silver—two gravy-spoons and a saltcellar—had been pawned for some weeks, since, in fact, the June quarter-day. But my mind was full of hypothetical opportunities.

As I came up the steps to our door, I remarked that Mr. Cobbins looked at me suddenly, closed his dull red curtains with a sort of alarmed resolution in his eye and vanished, and as I walked along the passage, he opened his door upon me suddenly and intercepted me.

He was in the clerical dress of that time, that consists that seems almost the strongest of all our old-world clothing, and he presented it in its shoshopiform—dark, of a poor texture, ill fitting, strangely cut. His long skirts accentuated the thickness of his body, the shortness of his legs. The white tie below his all-round collar, beneath his massive, large-spectacled face, was a little grubby, and between his not very clean teeth he held a briar pipe. His complexion was whitish, and although he was only thirty-three or four perhaps, his sandy hair was already thinning from the top of his head.

To your eye, now, he would seem the

strangest figure, in the utter disregard of all physical beauty or dignity about him. You would find him extraordinarily odd, but, in the old days, he met not only with acceptance but respect. He was alive until within a year or so ago, but his later appearance changed. As I saw him that afternoon, he was a very slender, ungainly little human being. You had no indication now that so he had been from the beginning. You felt he was not only drifting through life eating what came in his way, believing what came in his way, doing without any vigor what came in his way, but that last life also he had shifted. You could not believe him the child of pride and high resolve, or of any splendid passion of love. He had just *Augreed*. But we all happeneth. Why am I taking this tone over this poor little cur in particular?

"Hello!" he said, with an assumption of friendly ease. "Haven't seen you for weeks! Come in and have a gossip."

An invitation from the drawing-room lodger was in the nature of a command. I would have blushed very greatly to have refused it. Never was invitation more unimportant. But I had not the wit to think of an excuse. "All right," I said awkwardly, and he held the door open for me.

"I'd be very glad if you would," he amplified. "One doesn't get much opportunity of intelligent talk in this parish."

What the devil was he up to, was my newest preoccupation. He fussed about me with a nervous hospitality, talking in jumpy fragments, rubbing his hands together, and taking peep-sights over and round his glasses.

"They're going to give us trouble in the North Sea, it seems," he remarked with a sort of innocent zest. "I'm glad they mean fighting."

There was an air of culture about his room that always cowed me, and that made me constrained even in the corridor. The table under the window was littered with photographic material and the later albums of his Continental souvenirs. On the American cloth-trimmed shelves that filled the recesses on either side of the fireplace were what I used to think in those days a quite incredible number of books—perhaps eight hundred altogether, including the rarest, prettiest, photographs, albums and college and school text-books. This suggestion of learning was enhanced by the little wooden shield bearing a col-



IT TOOK ONE ENGLISH INDUSTRIAL TOWNS TO BRINGTON CHIMES



Byron's Beach, Greece.

THE DAY A LITTLE BOY THAT BEHOULD TO THE STARS, AND PLAYS ON THE BEACH

long coat of arms that hung over the looking-glass, and by a photograph of Mr. Gibbons in cap and gown in an Oxford dress that adorned the opposite wall. And in the middle of that wall stood his writing desk, which I knew to have papaedoties when it was open, and which made him seem not merely cultured, but learned. At that, he wrote a sentence, composing them himself.

"Yes," he said, taking possession of the hearth rug, "the war had to come sooner or later. If we shank their fleet for them now, well, there's an end to the matter."

He stood on his toes and then bumped down on his heels, and looked blandly through his spectacles at a water-color by his sister—the subject was a bunch of violets—above the sideboard which was like poetry and its chest and collar. "Yes," he said as he did so.

I coughed, and wondered how I might presently get away.

He invited me to smoke—that queer old practice—and then when I declined, began talking in a confidential tone of this "dreadful business" of the sailors. "The war won't improve that outlook," he said, and was very grave for a moment.

He spoke of the want of thought for their wives, and children, shown by the officers, in risking merely for the sake of the union, and this stirred me to contumacy, and disengaged me a little from my resolution to escape.

"I don't quite agree with that," I said, clearing my throat. "If the men didn't strike for the green men, if they let that be broken up, where would they be when the pinch of retribution did come?"

To which he replied that they couldn't

expect to get top-prize wages when the masters were selling bottom-prize coal. I replied: "That isn't it. The masters don't treat them fairly. They have to protect themselves."

To which Mr. Gabbitts answered: "Well, I don't know. I've been in the Four Towns some time, and I must say I don't think the balance of injustice falls on the masters' side."

"It falls on the men," I agreed, without understanding her.

And as we walked our way toward an argument, "Confound this argument!" I thought, but I had no skill in self-expression, and my irritation crept into my voice. Three little spots of color came into the cheeks and nose of Mr. Gabbitts, but his voice showed nothing of his ruffled temper.

"You see," I said, "I'm a socialist. I don't think this world was made for a small minority to dance on the backs of everyone else."

"My dear fellow," said the Reverend Mr. Gabbitts, "I'm a socialist too. Who isn't? But that doesn't lead me to class hatred."

"You haven't hit the bed of this confounded system, I have."

"Ah!" said he; and catching him on that note came a rap at the front door, and, as he hung suspended, the sound of my mother hitting some one in and a second rap.

"Now," thought I, and stood up, hesitatingly, but he would not let me. "No, no, no!" said he. "It's only for the Deacons money."

He put his hand against my chest with an effect of physical compulsion, and said, "Come in!"

"Our talk's just getting interesting," he protested; and there entered Miss Russell, an elderly little lady who was mighty in church help in Clayton.

He greeted her—the last to notice of me—and went to his bureau, and I remained standing by my chair but unable to get out of the room. "You are interrupting?" asked Miss Russell.

"Not in the least," he said, drawing out the carriage and opening his desk. I could not help seeing what he did.

I was so frittered by my impotence to leave him, that, at the moment, it did not occur to me at all with the research of the evening that he was taking out money. I listened intently to his talk with Miss Russell, and saw only, as they say in Wales, with the

front of my eyes, the small flat drawer that had, it seemed, quite a number of sovereigns scattered over its floor. "They're so unmerciful," complained Miss Russell. Who could be otherwise in a social organization that believed in *injustice*?

I turned away from there, put my foot on the fender, stuck my elbow on the polished-fringed mantelboard, and studied the photographs, pipes, and ash trays that adorned it. What was it I had to think out before I went to the station?

Of course! My mind made a queer, little, reluctant leap; it hit like being forced to leap over a bottomless chasm, and alighted upon the sovereigns that were just disappearing again as Mr. Gabbitts shut his drawer.

"I won't interrupt your talk further," said Miss Russell, receding dolefully.

Mr. Gabbitts played round her politly, and opened the door for her and conducted her into the passage, and for a moment or so I had the fullest sense of proximity to those—it seemed to me there must be ten or twelve—sovereigns.

The front door closed and he returned. My chance of escape had gone.

IV

"I must be going," I said, with a curiously reinforced desire to get away out of that room.

"My dear chap!" he insisted, "I can't think of it. Surely, there's nothing to call you away." Then with an evident desire to shift the venue of our talk, he asked, "You never told me what you thought of Babbie's little book?"

I was now, beneath my dull display of submissiveness, furiously angry with him. It occurred to me to ask myself why I should defer and qualify my opinions to him. Why should I pretend a feeling of intellectual and social inferiority toward him? He asked what I thought of Babbie. I resolved to tell him, if necessary, with arrogance. Then perhaps he would release me. I did not sit down again, but stood by the corner of the fireplace.

"That was the little book you lent me last summer?" I said.

"He reasons closely, eh?" he said, and indicated the armchair with a flat hand, and leaned persuasively.

I remained standing. "I didn't think much of his censoring powers," I said.

"He was one of the cleverest bishops London ever had."

"You may be. But he was sketching about in a jolly freethinkin'," said I.

"You mean?"

"That he's wrong. I don't think he proves his case. I don't think Christianity is true. He knows himself for the pretender he is. His reasoning—*v-ray*."

Mr. Gabbins went, I think, a shade paler than he was, and precipitation vanished from his manner. His eyes and mouth were round; his face seemed to get round; his eyebrows curved at my remarks.

"I'm sorry you think that," he said at last, with a catch in his breath.

He did not repeat his suggestion that I should sit. He made a step or so toward the window and turned. "I suppose you will admit—?" he began, with a faintly irritating note of intellectual condescension.

I will not tell you of his arguments or mine. You will find, if you care to look for them, in out-of-the-way corners of our book-menus, the abridged cheap publications—the publications of the Humanist Press Association, for example—on which my arguments were based. Lying in that curious little book with them, mixed up with them and infesting it alike, are the endless "Replies" of orthodoxy, like the railed dead in some hard-fought trench. All those disputes of our fathers, and they were sometimes furious disputes, have gone now beyond the range of comprehension. You younger people, I know, and there with impatience perplexed. You cannot understand how sane masters could imagine they had joined issue at all in most of those controversies. All the old methods of systematic thinking, the queer absurdities of the Aristotelian logic, have followed magic numbers and mystical numbers, and the Rompelstielchen magic of names, now into the blackness of the unthinkable. You can no more understand our theological positions than you can understand the fancies that made all ancient peoples speak of their gods only by circumlocutions, that made savages give away and die because they had been photographed, or an Elizabetian farmer turn back from a day's expedition because he had met three cows. Dorn L who have been through it all, re-

call our controversies, not with something near incredulity.

Faith we can understand to-day; all men live by faith. But, in the old time, everyone confused your hopeless faith and a forced, incredible belief in certain pseudo-concrete statements. I am inclined to say that neither believers nor unbelievers had faith as we understand it; they had insufficient intellectual power. They could not trust unless they had something to see and teach and say, like their barbarian ancestors who could not make a bargain without exchange of tokens. If they no longer worshipped stocks and stones, or clad out their needs with pilgrimages and images, they still held fiercely to visible images, to printed words and formulas.

But why revive the echoes of the ancient logomachies?

Suffice it that we lost our tempers very readily in pursuit of God and truth, and said impudent foolish things on either side. And on the whole—from the impartial perspective of my three and seventy years—I adjudicate that if my dialectic was bad, that of the Reverend Mr. Gabbins was altogether worse.

Little pink upon came into his cheeks, a squealing note into his voice. We interrupted each other more and more recklessly. We invented facts and appealed to authorities whose names I might never have heard; and, finding Mr. Gabbins' sky of the higher criticism and the Germans, I used the names of Karl Marx and Engels as Bible exegesis with no better effect. A silly *wangled*: a preposterous *wrangle*! You must suppose our talk becoming louder, with a developing quarrelsome note—my mother, no doubt, hearing in alarm at who should say: "My dear, don't offend Mr. Gabbins! Mr. Gabbins enjoys his friendship! Try to think whatever Mr. Gabbins says—" though we still kept in touch with a pretense of mutual deference. The ethical superiority of Christianity to all other religions came to the fore—I knew not how. We dealt with the matter in bold, impulsive generalizations, because of the insufficiency of our historical knowledge. I was moved to denounce Christianity as the ethics of slaves, and declare myself a disciple of a German writer of no little weight in those days, named Nietzsche.

For a disciple I must confess I was per-

markedly ill acquainted with the works of the master. Indeed, all I knew of him had come to me through a two-column article in "*The Cleric*" for the previous week. But the Reverend Mr. Gibbiss did not read "*The Cleric*."

It was, I know, putting a strain upon your credibility when I tell you that I now have little doubt that the Reverend Mr. Gibbiss was absolutely ignorant even of the name of Nietzsche, although that writer presented a separate and distinct sample of attack upon the faith that was in the reverend gentleman's keeping.

"I'm a disciple of Nietzsche," said I, with an air of extensive explanation.

He dashed away so awkwardly at the name that I repeated it at once.

"But do you know what Nietzsche says?" I pressed him vitally.

"He has certainly been adequately answered," said he, still trying to carry it off.

"Who by?" I rapped out hotly. "Tell me that!" and became extremely exasperant.

V

A happy accident relieved Mr. Gibbiss from the embarrassment of that challenge, and carried me another step along my course of personal disaster.

It came on the heels of my question in the form of a clatter of horses without, and the grind and creaking of wheels. I glimpsed a straw-hatted coachman and a pair of grays. It seemed an incredibly magnificent carriage for Clayton.

"Eh!" said the Reverend Mr. Gibbiss, going to the window. "Why, it's old Mrs. Verrall! It's old Mrs. Verrall! Really! What can she want with me?"

He turned to me, and the flush of controversy had passed and his face shone like the sun. It was not every day, I perceived, that Mrs. Verrall came to see him.

"I get so many interruptions," he said, almost grinning. "You must excuse me a minute! Then—then I'll tell you about that fellow. But don't go. I pray you don't go. I can assure you—most interesting."

He went out of the room waving vague, probability gestures.

"I must go," I cried after him.

"No, no, no!" in the passage. "I've got your answer," I think it was he added, and "quite mistakes," and I saw him coming down the steps to talk to the old lady.

I rose. I made three steps to the window, and this brought me within a yard of that accursed drawer.

I glanced at it, and then at that old woman who was so absurdly powerful, and instantly her son and Nietzsche's face were flitting in my brain. The Stuarts had, no doubt, already accepted accomplished facts. And I too—

What was I doing here?

What was I doing here while judgment escaped me?

I woke up. I was injected with energy. I took one reassuring look at the castle's sheepish bath, at the old lady's projected nose and quivering hand, and then with swift, clean movements I had the little drawer open, four sovereigns in my pocket, and the drawer shut again. Then again at the window—they were still talking.

That was all right. He might not look in that drawer for hours. I glanced at the clock. Twenty minutes still before the Birmingham train. Time to buy a pair of boots and get away. But how was I to get to the station?

I went out boldly into the passage, and took my hat and stick. Walk boldly past him?

Yes. That was all right! He could not argue with me while so important a person engaged him. I came down the steps.

"I want a like male, Mr. Gibbiss, of all the really deserving cases," old Mrs. Verrall was saying.

It is curious, but it did not occur to me that here was a mother whose son I was going to kill. I did not see her in that aspect at all. Instead, I was possessed by a realization of the blinding inflexibility of a social system that gave this pale old woman the power to give, or withhold, the urgent necessities of life from hundreds of her fellow-creatures just according to her poor, foolish old fancies of desert.

"We could make a good-sized lot of that son," he was saying, and glanced round with a preoccupied expression at me.

"I must go," I said in his flush of inspiration, and added, "I'll be back in twenty minutes," and went on my way. He turned again to his patroness as though he forgot me on the instant. Perhaps after all he was not sorry.

I felt extraordinarily cool and capable, exhilarated, if anything, by this prompt, effortful theft. After all, my great deter-

mission would achieve itself. I was no longer oppressed by a sense of obstacles, I left I could grasp accidents and turn them to my advantage. I would now go down Hockley Street to the little shoemaker—get a sound, good pair of boots—ten minutes—and then to the railway station—five minutes more—and off! I left as efficient and non-moral as if I was Nietzsche's superman already come. It did not occur to me that the carter's clock might have a considerable margin of error.

VI

I raised the train.

Partly, that was because the carter's clock was slow, and partly, it was due to the commercial obstinacy of the shoemaker, who would try on another pair after I had declared my time was up. I bought the final pair, however, gave him a wrong address for the return of the old ones, and only ceased to feel like the Nietzschean superman when I saw the train passing out of the station.

Even then I did not lose my head. It occurred to me almost at once that, in the event of a prompt pursuit, there would be a great advantage in not taking a train from Clayton; that, indeed, to have done so would have been an error from which only luck had saved me. As it was, I had already been very indolent in my inquiries about Shapxbury; for, over on the west, the clerk could not fail to remember me. Now the chances were against his coming into the case. I did not go into the station, therefore, at all; I made no demonstration of having missed the train, but walked quickly past, down the road, crossed the iron footbridge, and took the way back cautiously by Wilton's brick fields and the allotments to the way over Clayton Crest to Two-Mile Stone, where I calculated I should have an ample margin for the drag train.

I was not very greatly excited or alarmed then. Suppose, I reasoned, that by some accident the comic goes to that drawer at once: will he be certain to raise four or ten or eleven sovereigns? If he does, will he at once think I have taken them? If he does, will he act at once or wait for my return? If he acts at once, will he talk to my mother or call in the police? Then there are

a dozen roads and even railways out of the Clayton region; how is he to know which I have taken? Suppose he goes straight at once to the right station, they will not at once notice my departure for the simple reason that I didn't depart. But they may remember about Shapxbury? It was unlikely.

I resolved not to go directly to Shapxbury from Birmingham, but to go thence to Monksharpeyan, thence to Wyvern, and then come down on Shapxbury from the north. That might involve a night at some intermediate stopping place, but it would effectively conceal me from any but the most persistent pursuit. And this was not a case of murder yet, but only the theft of four sovereigns.

I had argued away all anxiety before I reached Clayton Crest.

At the Crest I looked back. What a world it was! And suddenly it came to me that I was looking at this world for the last time. If I overtook the fugitives and succeeded, I should die with them—or hang. I stopped and looked back more attentively at that wide, ugly valley.

It was my native valley, and I was going out of it, I thought, never to return, and perhaps that last protest, the group of towns that had become and dwelt and crippled and made me, seemed, in some indefinable manner, strange. I was, perhaps, more used to seeing it from this comprehensive view-point when it was veiled and softened by night; now it came out in all its work-day red, under a clear afternoon sun. That may account a little for its unkindliness. And perhaps, too, there was something in the emotions through which I had been passing for a week and more, to intensify my insight, to enable me to plumb the usual, to question the accepted. But it came to me then, I am sure, for the first time, how precarious, how higgledy-piggledy was the whole of that jumble of houses and farms, cellars and pot-banks, railway nests, nests, schools, forges and blast furnaces, churches, chapels, silent boughs, a vast, irregular agglomeration of ugly, smacking accidents in which even Fred as happy as frogs in a dust bin. Each thing jostled and damaged the other things about it, each thing injured the other things about it. The smoke of the faraway defiled the pot-bank clay, the clutter of the railway defiled the worshippers in church, the

public house thrust corruption at the school doors, the dairied houses separated miserably amidst the concentrations of industrialism, with an effect of groping luxuriance.

I did not think these things clearly that afternoon. Much less did I ask how I, with my murderous purpose, used to them all. I wrote down that evaluation of disorder and suffering here and now, as though I had thought it, but, indeed, then I only left it, left it transitorily as I looked back, and then stood with the thing evading from my mind.

I should never see that countryside again. I came back to that. At any rate I wasn't sorry. The chances were I should die in sweet air, under a clean sky. Then, as I turned to go on, I thought of my mother.

It seemed an evil world in which to have one's mother. My thoughts focused upon her very vividly for a moment. Down there, under that afternoon light, she was going to and fro, unaware as yet that she had lost me, bent and poking about in the darkling underground kitchen, perhaps carrying a lamp into the scullery to him, or sitting patiently, staring into the fire, waiting for me. A great pity for her, a great remorse at the blacker troubles that lowered over her breastnut head, came to me. Why, after all, was I doing this thing?

Why?

I stopped again dead, with the hill-crest rising between me and home. I had more than half a mind to return to her.

Then I thought of the curate's seven-sins. If he had missed them already, what should I return to? And even if I returned, how could I put them back?

And what of the night after I measured my revenge? What of the time when poor Verrell came back? And Nelly?

No! The thing had to be done.

But, at least, I might have kissed my mother before I came away, left her some message, reassured her, at least for a little while. All right she would have and wait for me.

Should I send her a telegram from Two-Mile Stone?

It was no good now; too late, too late. To do that would be to tell the course I had taken, to bring pursuit upon me, swift and sure, if pursuit there was to be. No. My mother must suffer!

I went on grimly toward Two-Mile Stone, but now as if some greater will than mine directed my footsteps thither.

I reached Berrington before darkness came, and just caught the last train for Monkshampton, where I had planned to pass the night.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH—THE PYRAMID OF THE TWO NOVES

I

AT the train carried me on from Birmingham to Monkshampton, it carried me not only into a country where I had never been before, but out of the commonplace daylight and the touch and quality of ordinary things, into the strange, apprehensive, and demented night that was ruled by the giant meteor of the last days.

There was, at that time, a curious accentuation of the common alternation of night and day. They became separated with a whitening difference of value in regard to all mundane affairs. During the day, the comet was an open in the newspapers; it was jocund by a thousand racing interests; it was an nothing in the days of the war-storm that now now upon

us. It was an astronomical phenomenon, somewhere away over Cheshire, millions of miles away in the deeps. We forgot it. But directly the sun sank, one turned over and again turned the sun, and the comet assumed its away over us.

One waited for its rising, and yet each night it came as a surprise. Always, it rose brighter than one had dared to think, always larger and with some wonderful change in its outline, and now with a strange, less luminous, greater heat upon it that grew with its growth, the under, of the earth. It shone also with its own light, so that this shadow was not hard or black, but it shone phosphorescently and with a diminishing intensity where the stimulus of the sun's rays was withdrawn. As it circled toward the zenith, as the last trailing daylight went after the whitening sun, its greenish-white illumination banished the scutifaces of day and diffused a bright

glassiness over all things. It changed the starless sky about it to an extraordinary deep blue, the profoundest color in the world, such as I have never seen before or since. I remember, too, that as I perched from the train that was rattling me along to Monkshamton, I passed and was passed by a copper-red light that mingled with all the shadows, that were cast by it.

It turned our ugly English industrial towns to phantom cities. Everywhere, the local authorities discontinued street lighting—one could read well print in the glass—and so, at Monkshamton, I went about through pale, white, sulphur streets, whose electric globes had shadows on the paths. Low windows, here and there, burnt reddish orange, like holes cut in some dream-curtain that hung before a furnace. A policeman with a rifle at his shoulder met me on the screen of incandescence, which a green-faced man opened to us, and there I abode the night. And the next morning, I opened with a mighty clatter, and was a dirty little beerhouse that stank of beer, and there was a fat and gaudy landlord with red spots upon his neck, and much noise-trouble going by on the cobblestones.

I came out, after I had paid my bill, into a street that echoed to the barking of two very-sadistic and to the noisy yapings of a dog they had raised to savagery. They were shooting "Great British dive-bombers" in the North Sea. A battleship lies with all hands!"

I bought a paper, and went on to the railway station seeking such details as were given of this triumph of the old civilization, of the blowing up of this great iron ship, full of gas and explosives and the most costly and beautiful machinery of which that time was capable, together with one hundred able-bodied men, all of them above the average, by a contact-bomb towed by a German submarine. I read myself into a fever of warlike emotion. Not only did I forget the meter, but for a time I forgot even the purpose that took me on to the railway station. I bought my ticket and was onward to Shapophamby.

So the hot day came to its own again, and people forgot the night.

Each night, these shone upon us more and more insistently, beauty, wonder, the promise of the day, and we were hushed, and marvelled for a space. And at the first grey washes of dawn again, at the glowing

of bolts and the noise of milk carts, we forgot, and the dusty, habited day came gawking and stretching back again. The stains of coal smoke crept across the houses, and we rose to the soiled, dirty-crusty routine of life.

"Thus life has always been," we said. "thus it will always be."

The glory of those nights was almost universally regarded as spectacular merely. It signified nothing to us. So far as western Europe went, it was only a small and ignorant section of the lower classes who regarded the comet as a portent of the end of the world. Abroad, where there were paupers, it was different, but in England the pauperity had already disappeared. Everyone read. The newspaper, in the quiet days, before our swift quarrel with Germany rushed to its climax, had absolutely dispelled all possibility of a panic in this matter. The very strange upon the highroads, the children in the nursery, had learned, that at the utmost the weight of that shining cloud could weigh but a few score tons. The fact had been shown quite conclusively by the enormous deflections that had, at last, swung it round square at our world. It had passed near three of the smallest asteroids without producing the minutest perceptible deflection in their course; while, on its own part, it had described a course through nearly three degrees. When it struck our earth there was to be a magnificent spectacle, no doubt, for those who were on the right side of our planet to see, but beyond that nothing. It was doubtful whether we were on the right side. The meteor would look larger and larger in the sky, but with the umbræ of our earth eating its heart of brightness out, and at last it would be the whole sky, a sky of luminous, green clouds, with a white brightness about the horizon, west and east. Then a pause—a pause of not very exactly defined duration—and then, no doubt, a great mass of shooting stars. They might be of some unrecorded color, because of the unknown element that lies in the green revealed. For a little while, the sunbeams would spot shooting stars. Some, it was hoped, would reach the earth and be available for analysis.

That, science said, would be all. The green clouds would whid and wash, and there might be thunderstorms. But, through the attenuated wisps of con-

skins, the old sky, the old stars, would reappear, and all would be as it had been before. And since the was to happen between one and eleven in the morning of the approaching Tuesday—I slept at Moulshampton on Saturday night—it would be only partially visible, if visible at all, on our side of the earth. Perhaps, if it came late, one would see no more than a shooting star low down in the sky. All this we had with the street authorities of science. Still, it did not prevent the last night being the most beautiful and memorable of human experience.

The nights had become very warm, and when, next day, I had ranged Shapxbury in vain, I was greatly tormented, as that unparalleled glory of the night returned, to think that under its splendid beneficence young Vernal and Nestle made love to each other.

I walked backward and forward, backward and forward, along the sea front, peering into the faces of the young couples who promenaded, with my hand in my pocket ready, and a curious ache in my heart that had no kindred with rage. Until at last all the promenaders had gone home to bed, and I was alone with the star.

My train from Weymouth to Shapxbury that evening was a whole hour late; they said it was on account of the movement of troops to meet a possible raid from the Elbe.

III

Shapxbury seemed an odd place to me even then. But something was quickening in me at that time to feel the oddness of many accepted things. Now in the retrospect, I see it as intensely queer. The whole place was strange to my untravelled eyes; the sea, even, was strange. Only twice in my life had I been at the sea-side before, and then I had gone by excursion to places on the Welsh coast whose great cliffs of rock and mountain background made the effect of the horizon very different from what it is upon the East Anglian seaboard. Here, what they called a cliff, was a crumpling bank of whitish-brown earth not fifty feet high.

As soon as I arrived I made a systematic exploration of Shapxbury. To this day I retain the clearest memories of the place I shaped out then, and how my impunes-

were incensed by the overpowering desire of everyone to talk of the chances of a German raid, before the Channel fleet got round to us. I slept at a small public house in a Shapxbury back street on Sunday night. I did not get to Shapxbury from Weymouth until two in the afternoon, because of the infrequency of Sunday trains, and I got no place whatever until late in the afternoon of Monday.

As the little local train bumped into eight of the places round the curve of a swelling hill, one saw a series of undulating grassy spaces, across which a number of conspicuous notice boards appealed to the eye and cut up the distant sea horizon. Most of them referred to convalescence or to remedies to follow the convalescence; and they were colored with a view to be memorable rather than beautiful, in "hand-cut" amidst the gentle, grayish tones of the east coast scenery. The greater number, I may remark, of the advertisements that were so conspicuous, a factor in the life of those days, and which rendered our vast tree-pulp newspaper possible, referred to foods, drinks, tobacco, and the drugs that promised a restoration of the quantity and these other articles had destroyed.

But, in addition to such boards, there were also the big black and white boards of various grandiloquently named "estates." The individualistic enterprise of that time had led to the plotting out, of nearly all the country round the sea-side towns, into roads and building-plots. All but a small portion of the south and east coast was in this condition; and, had the promises of those schemes been realized, the native population of the blanch might have been accommodated upon the sea-fronts. Nothing of the sort happened, of course. The whole of this agglomeration of the coast line was done to stimulate a little, foolish gambling in plots. One saw everywhere agents' boards in every state of drunkenness and decay, ill-made exploitation roads overgrown with grass, and here and there, at a corner, a label, "Tudhope Avenue," or "Sea View Road." Here and there, too, some small investor, some shopkeeper, with "surveys," had delivered his soul to the local builder and built himself a house, and there it stood, ill designed, mean looking, isolated, ill placed on a cheaply fenced plot, about which his domestic washing flattered in the breeze.

aristot a bold despotism of enterprise. Then, presently, our railway crossed a high-road, and a row of mean yellow brick houses—workmen's cottages, and the like, black slabs that made the "altars" of that time a universal epopee—marked our approach to the more central areas of—I quote the local guide-book—"one of the most delightful resorts in the East Anglian poppyland." Then more mean houses; the great magnificence of the electric power-station—it had a huge chimney, because no one understood how to make the combustion of coal complete—and then we were in the railway station, and hardly three-quarters of a mile from the center of the haunts of health and pleasure.

I inspected the town thoroughly before I made my inquiries. The road began boldly, with a row of cheap, pretentious, mud-splattered-looking shops, a public house, and a cab stand, but, after an interval of little red villas that were partly hidden amidst scrubby gardens, broke into a confoundedly bright, but not unpleasing, High Street, scattered that afternoon and substantially still. Somewhere in the background a church bell jangled, and children in bright, new-looking clothes were going to Sunday school. There, through a square of screened lodging-houses, that seemed a few and clearer version of my native square, I came to a garden of sulphur and camomile—the sea front. I sat down on a cast-iron seat, and surveyed, first of all, the broad stretches of muddy, sandy beach, with its queer wheeled bathing-machines, painted with the advertisements of somebody's pills—and then at the house fronts that stared out upon these vinous countrys. Boarding-houses, private hotels, and lodging-houses in terraces clustered closely right and left of me, and then came to an end. In one direction, scaffolding marked a building enterprise in progress; in the other, after a wide interval, rose a monstrous, bulging red shape, a huge hotel, that dwarfed all other things. Northwestward, were low, pale cliffs with white dentifications of trees, where the local volunteers, all bared arms, lay encamped, and, southward, a spreading waste of sandy dunes, with occasional bushes and clumps of stunted pine and an advertisement board or two. A harsh, like sky hung over all this prospect, the machine cast tiny shadows, and seaward was a whitish sea. It was Sunday, and

the midday meal still held people indoors.

A queer world! thought I even then—to you now it must seem impossibly queer—and after an interval I forced myself back to my own after.

How was I to ask? What was I to ask for?

My solution was fairly ingenious. I invented the following story. I happened to be taking a holiday in Shapshambury, and I was making use of the opportunity to seek the owner of a valuable feather bed, which had been left behind in the hotel of my uncle at Weymouth by a young lady, traveling with a young gentleman—no doubt a youthful married couple. They had reached Shapshambury sometime on Thursday. I went over the story many times, and gave my imaginary uncle and his hotel plausible names. At any rate, this yarn would serve as a complete justification for all the questions I might wish to ask.

I waited that, but I still sat for a time, wanting the energy to begin. Then I turned toward the big hotel. Its gorgeous magnificence seemed to my inexpert judgment to indicate the very place a rich young man of good family would select.

Huge, draught-proof doors were swung round for me by an ironically polite usher porter in a magnificence green uniform, who looked at my clothes as he listened to my question, and then, with a German accent, referred me to a gorgeous head portier, who directed me to a princely young man behind a counter of brass and polished, like a bank—like several banks. This young man, while he answered me, kept his eye on my collar and tie, and I knew that they were abominable.

"I want to find a lady and gentleman who came to Shapshambury on Thursday," I said.

"Friends of yours?" he asked, with a terrible fitness of irony.

I made out at last that here, at any rate, the young people had not been. They might have finished here, but they had had no room. But I went out—door opened again for me obsequiously—in a state of social discomfiture, and did not attack any other establishment that afternoon.

My resolution had come to a sort of nib. More people were proceeding, and their Sunday smartness attacked me. I forgot

my purpose in an acute sense of myself. I felt that the bulge of my pocket caused by the revolver was conspicuous, and I was ashamed. I went along the sea front away from the town, and presently lay down among palms and sea poppies. The mood of miasma prevailed with me all that afternoon. In the evening, about sundown, I went to the station and asked questions of the porters there. But porters, I found, were a class of men who transported luggage rather than people, and I had no sort of idea what luggage young Vernal and Nettie were likely to have with them.

Then I fell into conversation with a stalwart, wooden-legged old man with a silver ring, who swept the steps that went down to the beach from the pavilion. He knew much about young couples, but only in general terms, and nothing of the particular young couple I sought. He reminded me, in the most disagreeable way, of the sensuous aspects of life, and I was not sorry when presently a gondola appeared in the offing, signifying the coast guard and the camp, and cut short his observations upon holidays, beaches, and morals.

I went, and now I was past my shift, and sat in a seat upon the pavilion, and watched the brightening of those rising clouds of chilly fire that made the ruddy west seem tame. My midday豪邁 was gone, my blood was running warmer again. And as the twilight and that silvery brightness replaced the dusty sunlight and robbed the substantial play of all its matter-of-fact querulousness, and its sense of useless materialism, romance returned to me, and passion, and my thoughts of honor and revenge. I remember that change of mood as occurring very vividly on this occasion, but I fancy that, less distinctly, I had felt this many times before. In the old times, night and the starlight had an effect of intimate reality the daytime did not possess.

I had a queer illusion that night, that Nettie and her lover were close at hand, that suddenly I should come on them. I have already told how I went through the dark seeking them in every couple that drew near. And I dropped asleep, at last, in an unfamiliar bedroom, hung with gaudily decorated walls, cursing myself for having wasted a day.

I sought them to van the next morning, but after midday, I came in quick succession on a perplexing multitude of chums. After failing to find any young couple that corresponded to young Vernal and Nettie, I presently discovered an unsatisfactory quartette of couples.

Any of these four couples might have been the one I sought; with regard to none of them was there conviction. They had all arrived on either Wednesday or Thursday. Their couple were still in occupation of their rooms, but neither of them were at home. Late in the afternoon, I reduced my list by eliminating a young man in drab, with side-whiskers and long cuffs, accompanied by a lad, of thirty or more, of conspicuously ladylike type. I was disgusted at the sight of them. The other two young people had gone for a long walk, and, though I watched their boarding-house until the fiery cloud shone out above, sharing and snatching in an unusually splendid sunset, I missed them. Then I discovered them dining at a separate table in the bay window, with red-shaded candles between them, peering out over and again at this splendor that was neither night nor day. The girl in her pink evening dress looked very light and pretty to me, pretty enough to storage me; she had well-shaped arms and waist, well-rounded shoulders, and the turn of her cheek and the fair hair about her ears were full of subtle delights. But she was not Nettie, and the happy man with her was that odd, degenerate type our old aristocracy produced with such cold frequency--clumsy, large, booby nose, small, feeble, languid expression, and a neck that had dimmed and received a venereal sheen of collar. I stood outside in the moon's half light, biting them and cursing them for having delayed me so long.

That foisted Shapshadoey. The question I now had to deliberate was, which of the remaining couples I had to pursue.

I walked back to the pavilion trying to reason my next step out, and mattering to myself, because there was something in that luminous wonderfulness that touched one's brain, and made one feel a little light-headed.

One couple had gone to London, the other had gone to the bungalow village at

Bone Chil. Where, I wondered, was Bone Chil?

I came upon my wooden-legged man at the top of his steps.

"Hello!" said I.

He pointed seaward with his pipe; his silver ring shone in the skylight.

"There," he said.

"What is?" I asked.

"Searchlight! Smoke! Ships going north! If it wasn't for the blasted Milky Way gone green up there, we might see."

He was too intent to heed my questions for a time. Then he vacuolated over his shoulder:

"Know bungalow village? — rather. Arctic and such. Mac going on! Mac and bobbing — something scandalous. Yes."

"But where is it?" I said, suddenly exasperated.

"There!" he said. "What's that flicker? A gas-flash—or I'm a lost soul!"

"You'd hear," I said, "long before it was near enough to see a flash."

He didn't answer. Only by making it clear I would distract him could I tell me what I wanted to know, could I get him to turn from his absorbed contemplation of that phantom dance between the sea shore and the stars.

"Seven miles," he said, "along this road. And now go to 'em with ye!"

I answered with some foul insult by way of thanks, and so we parted, and I set off toward the bungalow village.

I feared a poltergeist, staring sky-gazing, a little way beyond the end of the parapet. He walked the wooden-legged man's direction.

"It's a lonely road, you know," he called after me.

I had an odd intuition that now, at last, I was on the right track. I left the dark masses of Shapxbury behind me, and pushed out into the skin pallor of that night.

The incidents of that long tramp I do not recall in any orderly succession. The one progressive thing is my memory of a growing fatigue. The sea was, for the most part, smooth and shining like a mirror, a great expanse of reflecting silver, humped by slow, broad undulations; but, at one time, a little larvae breathed like a faint sigh and ruffled their long bodies into faint, noisy ripples that never completely died out again. The way was

sometimes sandy, thick with silvery, colorless sand, and sometimes chalky and lumpy, with lumps that had shining facets; a black scrub was scattered, sometimes in thickets, sometimes in single bushes, among the sombredest bunches of sand. At one place, came green, and ghostly green sheep lowing up among the gray. After a time, black pine woods intervened, and made scattered darknesses along the road, woods that dried out at the edges to weirdly warped and stunted trees. Then, isolated pine wreaths would appear, and make their rigid gestures at me as I passed. Grossly ugly incognitos amidst these forms, I presently came on estate boards, appealing, "Houses can be built to suit purchaser," to the silence, to the shadows, and to the glare.

Once I witnessed the persistent barking of a dog from somewhere inland of me, and several times I took out and examined my revolver very carefully. I must, of course, have been full of my intention when I did that; I must have been thinking of Nettie and revenge, but I cannot now recall those emotions at all. Only I see again, very distinctly, the greenish gleams that ran over rock and barrel as I turned the weapon in my hand.

Then there was the sky, the wonderful, luminous, starless, moonless sky, and the empty, blue depths of the edge of it, between the ocean and the sun. And over —strange phantoms—I saw far out upon the skin, and very small and distant, three long, black writhings, without heads, or tails, or snake, or any lighter, dark, deadly, furtive things, traveling very swiftly and keeping an equal distance. And when I looked again they were very small, and then the skin had swallowed them up.

Then once, a flash and what I thought was a gas, until I looked up and saw a fading trail of greenish light still hanging in the sky. And after that, there was a shiver and whispering in the air, a stronger thrashing in each arteries, a sense of refreshment, a reversal of purpose.

Somewhere upon my way the road forked, but I do not remember whether that was near Shapxbury or near the end of my walk. The hesitation between two routes made such a deep impression on my mind.

At last I grew weary. I came to piled heaps of decaying seaweed and cast tracks

running this way and that, and then I had missed the road, and was stumbling among sand-hummocks quite close to the sea. I came out on the edge of the dimly glittering sandy beach, and something phosphorescent drew me to the water's edge. I bent down and peered at the little luminous specks that floated in the ripples.

Presently, with a sigh, I stood erect and contemplated the lonely peace of that last wonderful night. The comet had now trailed its shining robe across the whole space of the sky and was beginning to set; in the east, the blue was coming to its own again; the sea was an intense edge of blackness.

How beautiful it was! how still and beautiful! Peace! peace!—the peace that passeth understanding, ruled in light descending!

My heart swelled, and suddenly I was weeping.

I did not want to kill. I did not want to be the servant of my passions any more. A great desire had come to me to escape from life, from the daylight which is heat and conflict and desire, into that cool night of eternity—and rest. I had played, I had done.

I stood upon the edge of the great ocean, and I was filled with an inarticulate spirit of prayer, and I desired greatly—peace from myself.

And presently, there in the east, would come again the red discoloring certain over these waters, the faint world again, the gray and growing harsh certainties of dawn. My resolve, I knew, would take up with me again. This was a rest for me, an interlude, but to-morrow I should be William Loadholt once more, ill-nourished, ill-dressed, ill-equipped and clumsy, a thief and shamed, a wretch upon the face of life, a source of trouble and sorrow even to the mother I loved; no hope in life left for me now but revenge before my death.

Why this policy then, revenge? It entered into my thoughts that I might end the matter now and let these others go.

To wade out into the sea, into the warm lapping that mingled the natures of water and light, to stand there breast-high, to thrust my revolver barrel into my mouth—?

Why not?

I moved about with an effort. I walked slowly up the beach thinking.

I turned and looked back at the sea. No! Something within me said, "No!" I must think.

It was troublesome to go farther because the hummocks and the tangled bushes began. I sat down amidst a black cluster of shrubs, and rested, chin on hand. I drew my revolver from my pocket and looked at it, and held it in my hand. Life? Or death?

I seemed to be probing the very depths of being, but, indeed, imperspectively I fell asleep, and sat dreaming.

IV

Two people were bathing in the sea.

I had awakened. It was still that white and wonderful night, and the blue band of clear sky was no wider than before. These people must have come late night as I fell asleep, and awakened me almost at once. They waded breast-deep in the water, swimming, coming shoreward, a woman, with her hair coiled about her head, and in pursuit of her a man, graceful figures of black and silver, with a bright green surge flowing off from them, a patterning of flashing waves about them.

Each wore a tightly fitting bathing dress that hid nothing of the plump, dripping beauty of their youthful forms.

She glanced over her shoulder and found him nearer than she thought, started, gaspulated, gave a little cry that pierced me to the heart, and fled up the beach obliquely toward me, running like the wind, and passed me, vanished amidst the black, distorted bushes, and was gone, she and her partner, in a moment, over the ridge of sand.

I heard her shout between exhaustion and laughter.

And suddenly I was a thing of tempest fury, shouting with hands held up and clenched, rigid in a gesture of impotent threatening, against the sky.

For this staring, white thing of light and beauty, was Nelly, and this was the man for whom I had been betrayed!

In another moment I was running and stumbling, revolver in hand, in quiet, unsuspected pursuit of them, through the soft and noiseless sand.

In the Days of the Comet

BY H. G. WELLS

Illustrated by *Alberto Danna*

BOOK THE FIRST—THE COMET

CHAPTER THE FIFTH—THE COMET OF THE TWO LOVERS—(continued)

SUMMER. The叙述者, William Leadford, is telling of events in his youth before the Great Change. Through his friend Peacock he has become a socialist, and is also interested in a great comet whose path is approaching the earth's orbit. The fact is more important to him than the spread of socialism, for what will happen if the comet strikes the earth? Meanwhile, names are had in England, owing to strikes, lockouts, overproduction, and the appearance of American products in the market. And, besides, war has just broken out between England and Germany. Leadford has been engaged on many "Red" meetings, but she has broken with him on account of his beliefs. The young man still loves the girl and continues to visit her. On one of these visits he learns that she has eloped with Edward Vennell, the son of her father's employer. The couple have gone to a resort on the coast road. Leadford follows them, carrying a revolver he has bought. Arriving, he learns that they are probably to be found at a little summer colony known as the "bungalow village."

V

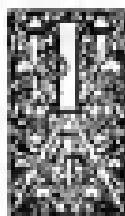
CAME up over the little ridge and discovered the bungalow village I had been seeking, resting in a crescent bay of dunes. A door slammed; the two runners had vanished. I halted, staring.

There was a group of three bungalows nearer to me than the others. Into one of these there they had gone, and I was too late to see which. All had doors and windows curiously open, and none showed a light.

This place, upon which I had at last happened, was a trait of the reaction of artistic-minded and curiously living people, against the costly and uncomfortable social stiffness of the more formal middle classes of that time. It was, you must understand, the custom of the steam mill-ways companies to sell their cars after they had been obsolete for a sufficient length of time, and some genius had hit upon the possibility of turning these into little, habitable cabins for the summer holiday. The thing had become a fashion with a certain bohemian-spirited class; they added cabin to cabin, and these little improvised homes, gaily painted and with broad verandas and

supplementary lattices added to their accommodation, made the brightest contrast conceivable to the dull rigidity of the former resort. Of course, there were many difficulties in such camping that had to be faced cheerfully, and so the broad, sandy beach was sacred to high spirits and the young. Art, music and boozing, Chinese laundries and drying, are boozing "rites," I find, in the impression of those who once knew such places well. I saw the thing as no gathering of light hearts and gay idleness, but gaily, after the manner of poor men poisoned by the suppression of all their cravings after joy. To the poor man, to the grim winter, beauty and deliciousness were absolutely denied; out of a life of grimy dirt, of maddled desire, they watched their happy friends with a bitter envy and feel, tormenting suspicion. Fancy a world in which the common people had less to be a sort of beatitude, even sister to being drunk!

There was, in the old time, always something cruel at the bottom of this business of sexual love. At least that is the impression I have brought with me across the gulf of the Great Change. To succeed in love seemed such triumph as no other means could give, but to fail was as if one was tainted.



I felt no sense of singularity that this thread of savagery should run through these emotions of mine, and became now the whole strand of these emotions. I believed, and I think I was right in believing, that the love of all true lovers was a sort of defiance then, that they closed a system in each other's arms and mocked the world without. You loved against the world, and these two loved at me. They had their business with each other, under the throat of a watchful fierceness. A sword, a sharp sword, the keenest edge in life, lay among their roses.

Whatever may be true of this for others, for me and my imagination, at any rate, it was altogether true, I was never far defilèd; I was never a jesting lover. I waited feebly, I made love impatiently. Perhaps I had written impudent love letters for that very reason; because with this stark theme I could not play.

All the nearer bungalows were very still now. If I walked softly to them, from open windows, from smacking sun or overheard, I might get a clue to guide me. Should I advance circuitously, creeping upon them, or should I walk straight to the door? It was bright enough for her to recognize me clearly at a distance of many paces.

"Down!" the sound crept upon my sense, and then again it came.

I turned impatiently, in one turn upon an impatience, and beheld a great iron-clad not four miles out, scorching fast across the sloping sides, and from its funeral sparks, intensely red, poured out into the right. As I turned, came the hot flush of its guns, flying onward, and answering this, red flashes and a streaming smoke in the line between me and sky.

With a shuddering him, a rocket from a bungalow beyond the village leaped up and burst hot-gold against the glass, and the sound of the third and fourth guns reached me.

The windows of the dark bungalows, one after another, leaped out, squares of maddly brightness that flared and flickered and became steadily bright. Dark heads appeared, looking onward, a door opened and sent out a brief line of yellow to mingle and be lost in the comet's brightness. That brought me back to the darkness in hand.

I became aware of the voices of people

calling to see another in the village. A white-robed, hooded figure, some man in a bathing wrap, absurdly suggestive of an Arab in his turban, came out from one of the nearer bungalows, and stood clear and still and shadowless in the glare.

He put his hands to shade his upward eye, and shouted to people within.

First one, and then two, other wrapped figures came out of the bungalows to join the first. His arm pointed upward, and his voice, a full tenor, rose in explanation. I could hear some of the words. "It's a *Grenade!*" he said. "She's caught."

Some one disputed that, and these followed a little indistinct babble of argument. I went on slowly in the circuit I had marked out, watching these people as I went.

They shouted together with such a common intensity of direction that I looked and looked seaward. I saw the tall fountain flung by a shot that had just missed the great warship. A second rose still nearer us, a third, and a fourth, and then, a great spray of dust, a whirling cloud, leaped out of the horizon whence the rocket had come, and spread, with a slow deliberation, right and left. Flashed on that an enormous crack, and the case with the full volar leaped and cried, "Hoh!"

Let me see! Of course, I had to go round beyond the bungalows, and then come up toward the group from behind.

A high-pitched, woman's voice called: "Honeymooners! honeymooners! Come out and see!"

Something gleamed in the shadow of the nearer bungalow, and a man's voice answered from within. What he said, I did not catch, but suddenly I heard Nitro calling very distinctly, "We've been barking."

The man who had first come out shouted: "Don't you hear the guns? They're firing—not five miles from shore."

"Eh?" answered from the bungalow, and a window opened.

"Out there!"

I did not hear the reply, because of the faint rustle of my own movements. Clearly, these people were all too much occupied by the battle to look in my direction, and so I walked now straight toward the darkness that held Nitro and the black desire of my heart.



HE AIMED POINTED SEAWARD, AND I COULD HEAR SOME OF THE WORDS. "IT'S A GERMANY!" HE SAID. "SHE'S CAUGHT."

"Look!" cried some one, and pointed skyward.

I glanced up, and behold! the sky was streaked with bright green trails. They radiated from a point halfway between the western horizon and the zenith; and within the shining clouds of the meteor, a streaming movement had begun, so that it seemed to be pouring both waywardly and back toward the east, with a crackling sound, as though the whole heaven was stippled over with phantom pistol shots. It seemed to me then, as if the meteor was coming to help me, descending with those thousand pistols like a curtain to feed off this unmeaning foolishness of the sea.

To glance up at that steady, stirring, light scour of the sky made one's head swim. I stood for a moment dazed, and more than a little giddy. I had a curious instant of purely speculative thought. Suppose, after all, the Iassics were right, and the world was coming to an end. What a scene that would be for Padfoot!

Then it came into my head that all these things were happening to corroborate my revenge! The war below, the heavens above, were the thousand portents of my deed. I heard Nettie's voice cry out not fifty yards away, and my passion surged again. I was in return to her amid those horrors, bearing unanticipated death.

It was fifty yards, forty yards, thirty yards—the little group of people, still heedless of me, was larger and more important now; the green-shot sky, and the fighting ships were remote. Some one darted out from the bargeolue, with an interrupted question, and stopped, suddenly aware of me. It was Nettie, with some exasperation, dark whip about her, and the green glare shining on her sweet face and white throat. I could see her expression, unbroken with dismay and terror at my advance, as though something had seized her by the heart and held her still—a target for my shots.

"Hoosel!" came the bargeolue's gunboat like a command. "Bang!" the bullet leaped from my hand. Do you know, I did not want to shoot her then. Indeed, I did not want to shoot her then! "Bang!" and I had fired again, still striking on, and—such that it seemed I had missed.

She moved a step or so toward me, still staring, and then some one intervened, and over beside her I saw young Verrell.

A heavy stranger, the man in the hooded bath-gown, a fat, formic-looking man, came out of nowhere like a shield before them. He seemed a preposterous interlocutor. His face was full of amazement and terror. He rushed across my path with arms extended and open hands, as one might try to stop a runaway horse.

By an enormous effort I resisted a mechanical impulse to shoot through his fat body. Anyhow, I knew I wouldn't shoot him. For a moment I was in doubt. Then I became very active, turned with alacrity and dodged his paring arm to the left, and so fended two others immediately in my way. I fired a third shot in the air, just over their heads, and ran at them. They hastened left and right. I pulled up and faced about within a yard of a foot-faced young man coming sideways, who seemed about to grapple me. At my musket butt, he fell back a pace, ducked, and threw up a defensive arm, and then I perceived the course was clear, and ahead of me, young Verrell and Nettie—he was, halting her arm to help her—running away.

I fired a fourth ineffectual shot, and then, in an access of fury at my misses, started out to run them down and shoot them down to kickshaws.

None one pursued me, perhaps several persons—I do not know. We left them all behind.

We ran. For a space I was altogether intent upon the wild meteorology of flight and pursuit. The clouds were charged to a whit of great moonshine, the air was thunder. A humurous green haze rolled about us. What did such things matter? We ran. Did I gain or lose? That was the question. They ran through a gap in a broken fence that sprung up abruptly out of nothingness, and turned to the right. I noted we were in a road. But this green road! One seemed to glow through it. They were fading now it, and at that thought I made a spurt that was a dozen feet or more.

She staggered. He gripped her arm, and dragged her forward. They doubled to the left. We were off the road again and on land—it felt like mud. I tripped and fell at a ditch that was somehow full of mud, and was up again, but now they were phantom half gone into the mud which about me.



WITHIN THE SWIRLING CLOUDS OF THE METEOR A STREAMING MOVEMENT HAD BEEN



11.1000 METALICAS, 1990, 100 X 100 CM, OLEO Sobre TELA, MUSEO NACIONAL DE ARTE, MEXICO CITY

Still I ran.

On, on! I groaned with the violence of my effort. I staggered again and awoke. I felt the consciousness of great pain tear past me through the muck.

They were gone! Everything was gone, but I kept on running. Once more I stumbled. There was something about my feet that impeded me, tall grass or heather, but I could not see what it was, only this muck that added about my

know. There was a noise and splintering in my brain, a vain resistance to a dark, green curtain that was falling, falling, falling, held open held. Everything grew darker and darker.

I made one last frantic effort, raised my revolver, fired my penultimate shot at a venture, and fell headlong to the ground. And behold! the green curtain was a black one, and the earth and I and all things ceased to be.

BOOK THE SECOND—THE GREY VAPORS

CHAPTER THE FIRST—THE CHAOS

I

SEEMED to awaken out of a reboiling sleep. I did not awaken with a start, but opened my eyes, and lay very comfortably, looking at a line of extrordinarily sweet poppies that glowed against a glowing sky. It was the sky of a magnificent sunrise, and an archipelago of gold-beaten, purple-blown, floated in a sea of golden green. The poppies too, sun-baked back, blazing circles, translucent, shot seed rough, stoutly uprooted, had a luminous quality, seemed wrought only from some mere cold kind of light.

I stared uncomprehendingly at these things for a time, and then there rose upon my consciousness, intermingling with these, the twirling golden-green heads of growing barley.

A remote faint question, where I might be, drifted and vanished again in my mind. Everything was very still.

Everything was as still as death.

I felt very light, full of the sense of physical well-being. I perceived I was lying on my side in a little rounded space in a weedy, flowering barley field, that was, in some inexplicable way, saturated with light and beauty. I sat up, and remained for a long time filled with the delight and charm of the delicate little convolvulus that twined among the barley stems, the primrose that faced the ground below.

Thus that question returned. What

was this place? How had I come to be sleeping here?

I could not remember.

It perplexed me that, somehow, my body felt strange. It was unfamiliar—I could not tell how—and the barley, and the beautiful weeds, and the slowly developing glory of the dawn behind, all these things partook of the same unfamiliarity. I felt as though I was a thing in some very luminous, painted window, as though this dawn broke through me. I felt I was part of some exquisite picture painted in light and joy.

A faint hoarse beat and rustled the barley heads, and jogged my mind forward.

Who was I? That was a good way of beginning.

I held up my left hand and arm before me, a grabby hand, a framed cuff, but with a quality of painted unreality, unfigured, as a figure might have been by Botticelli. I looked for a time steadfastly at a beautiful pearl earring link.

I remembered Willie Leadford, who had owned that arm and hand, as though he had been worn out else.

Of course! My hater—a rough户外者, rather than the benevolent pre—began to shape itself in my memory, very small, very bright and luminous. Like a thing wrapt through a microscope. Clayton and Southwicks recurred to mind, the dawn and darkness, Dijonaise, carnage, and in their rich, dark colors, pulsing, and through them I went toward my destiny. I sat, hands on knees, recalling that queer, passionate career that had ended with my futile shot into the growing

darkness of the End. The thought of that shot aside my resolves again.

There was something in it now, something absurd, that made me smile pitifully.

Poor little, angry, miserable creature! Poor little, angry, miserable world!

I sighed for pity, not only pity for myself, but for all the hot beauties, the tormented Unions, the smoldering, stirring things of hope and pain that had found their peace at last beneath the pouring rain and suffocation of the comet. Because surely that world was over and done. They were all so weak and unhappy, and I was now so strong and so sure. For I felt sure I was dead; no one living could have this perfect assurance of good, this strong and confident peace. I had quaffed an oval of the fever called living. I was dead, and it was all right, and that—

I felt an inconsistency.

These, then, must be the barley fields of God—the still and silent barley fields of God, full of undying poppy flowers whose seeds bear peace.

II

It was queer to find barley fields in Boston, but no doubt there were many surprises in store for me.

How still everything was! Peace! The peace that passes understanding. After all it had come to me! But, indeed, everything was very still. Surely I was alone in the world! No birds sang. Yes, and all the distant sounds of life had ceased, the lowing of cattle, the barking of dogs.

Something that was like fear baptised, came into my heart. It was all right, I knew, but to be alone! I stood up and met the last sunbeams of the rising sun, leaping toward me, as it were, with glad tidings, over the spikes of the barley.

Blinded, I made a step. My foot struck something hard, and I looked down to discover my revolver, a like-black thing, like a dead snake at my feet.

For a moment that puzzled me.

Then I close forgot about it. The winter of the gods took possession of my soul. Dawn, and no birds sang!

How beautiful was the world! How beautiful, but how still! I walked slowly through the barley toward a line of elder bushes, weeping tree and brierbush that made the hedge of the field. I noted as

I passed along a three mouse dead, as it seemed to me, among the bushes, then a still toad. I was surprised that the did not leap aside from my footfalls, and I stooped and picked it up. Its body was long like his, but it made no struggle, the brightness of its eye was veiled; it did not move in my hand.

It seems to me now that I stood holding that little little creature for some time. Then very softly I stooped down and replaced it. I was trembling—trembling with a needless emotion. I looked with quickened eyes closely among the barley stems, and behold, now everywhere I saw beetles, flies, and little creatures that did not move, lying as they fell when the vapors overcame them; they seemed no more than painted things. Some were very familiar with external things. "My God!" I cried; "but is it only I?"

And then, at my next movement, something quivered sharply. I turned about, but I could not see it; only I saw a little silv in a rat and heard the diminishing rattle of the unseen creature's flight. And at that, I turned to my task again, and an eye moved and it stared. And presently, with false and beatific pattern, it stretched its limbs and began to crawl away from me.

But wonder, that gentle sister of love, had me now. I saw a little way ahead, a brown and crimson butterfly perched upon a cornflower. I thought at first it was the breeze that stirred it, and then I saw its wings were quivering. And even as I watched it, it started into life, and spread itself, and fluttered into the air.

I watched it fly, a turn this way, a turn that, until suddenly it seemed to vanish. And now, life was returning to this thing and that on every side of me, with slow stretchings and broodings, with trillings, with a little start and stir.

I came slowly, stepping very carefully because of these dragged, torpid awakening things, through the barley to the hedge. It was a very glorious hedge, so that it held my eyes. It showed along and interlaced like a cylinder music. It was rich with hawks, honey-suckles, caypions, and ragged robin, bedstraw, hops, and wild clams, twisted and hung among its branches, and all along its ditch border the stony ditch were lined its childish ferns, and blossomed



I STOOD UP AND MET THE HOT SUMMERS OF THE RISING SUN, BURNING TOWARD ME, AS IT WERE, WITH GLAD TISHING, OVER THE SPICES OF BARLEY.

in lines and masses. Never had I seen such a symphony of note-like flowers and tendrils and leaves. And suddenly in its depths, I heard a chirrup and the whirr of fluttered wings.

Nothing was dead, but everything had changed to beauty! And I stood for a time with close and happy eyes looking at the marvellous splendor before me and marveling how richly God has made his works.

It might be the old world indeed, but something new lay open all things, a glowing multitude of health and happiness. It might be the old world, but the dust and fury of the old life was certainly done. At least I had no doubt of that.

I recalled the last phases of my former life, that shuddering class of pursuit and anger, the universal darkness, and the whirling green vapors of confusion. The comet had struck the earth and made an

end to all things. Of that no I was assured.

But afterwards?

And now?

The imaginations of my boyhood came back to speculative possibilities. In those days I had believed firmly in the necessary advent of a last day, a great coming out of the sky, unceasings and fear, the Resurrection, and the Judgment. My roving fancy now suggested to me that this Judgment must have come and passed, that it had passed and in some manner missed me. I was left alone here, in a swept and garnished world to begin again perhaps.

I laughed heartily and long. And behold! even as I laughed, the keen point of things accomplished stabb'd my spirit, and I was weeping, weeping aloud, convulsed with weeping, and the tears were pouring down my face.

(To be continued.)

The First Furrow

BY JAMES A. MONTAGUE

Illustrated by John Everett Millais

Don't you ever feel a yearnin', 'long about this time o' year,
For a robin's song to tell you that the summer time is near?
Don't you ever sort o' hanker for the blackbirds whistlin' call,
Echoin' through the hillside orchard, when the blossoms used to fall?
Don't you wish that you were out there, headin' in the April air,
Full o' glad an' careless boyhood, an' with strength an' health to spare?
Don't it *hurt* you to remember, when the springtime comes around,
How the first, long, tollin' furrow used to wake the sleepy ground?

How'd you like to take the children, born to dirty city streets,
Out to where the bees go pulsin' when the heart o' nature beats?
How'd you like to watch 'em wunder at the boomin' of the bees,
Or to see 'em dodge the petals that are answerin' from the trees?
How'd you like to see their faces catch the color o' the rose,
As they meander across the meadow where the earliest crocus grows?
Wouldn't it be joy to watch 'em follow on behind the plow,
As it eat the first brown furrow, like it's doin' out there now?



In the Days of the Comet

BY H. G. WELLS

Illustrated by Daniel Frost

BOOK THE SECOND—THE GREEN VAPORS

CHAPTER THE FIRST—THE CHANGE—(CONTINUED)

WHEN we awoke the previous forenoon, dull with happenings in England just before the Great Change, when a huge comet is threatening to come in contact with the earth. In addition to bad times and general discontent with existing social conditions, England has gone to war with Germany. The minister, William Bedford, has become a socialist through the influence of his friend Pritchard. This move leads to the breaking of Bedford's engagement to Susanna Bovary. The young man still loves the girl, and when she elopes with Edward Verrall, the son of her father's employer, he follows the couple to a resort on the East coast. Here he attempts to kill the lovers with his revolver. But the shots go wild, and just then the earth, passing into the comet's path, is enveloped in a gas which renders every living being unconscious. This state lasts a few hours, and then the whole world revives. An amazing effect of the gas on the human eye is not evident.

III

EVERYWHERE the awakening came with the sunrise. We awoke to the glad noise of the morning, we walked dazed in a light that was joy. Everywhere that was so. It was always morning. It was morning because, until the direct rays of the sun reached it, the changing nitrogen of our atmosphere did not pass into its permanent phase, and

the sleepers lay as they had fallen. In an intermediate state, the air being inert, incapable of producing either revival or stuporisation, no longer green, but not yet changed to the gas that now lives in us.

To everyone, I think, came some parallel to the mental state. I have already sought to describe—a wonder, an impression of joyful novelty. There was also, very commonly, a certain confusion of the intellects, a difficulty in self-recognition. I remember clearly, as I sat on my stool, that previously I had the clearest doubts of my own identity and fell into the collect

metaphysical questioning. "If this be I," I said, "then how is it I am no longer madly seeking Nettie? Nettie is now the nearest thing—and all my wrongs. Why have I suddenly passed out of all that passion? Why does not the thought of Verrell quiver my pulses?"

I was only one of many millions who, that morning, had the same doubts. I suppose one knew oneself for oneself, when one awoke from sleep or insensibility, by the familiarity of one's bodily sensations, and that morning all our most intimate bodily sensations were changed. The ultimate chemical processes of life were changed and its nervous reactions. For the fluctuating, uncertain, power-darkened thoughts and feeling of the old time came steady, full-bodied, wholesome processes. Touch was different, sight was different, sound and all the senses were subtler. Had it not been that our thought was clearer and fuller, I believe great multitudes of men would have gone mad. But, as it was, we understood. The dominant impression I could convey in this account of the Change is one of enormous release, of a vast, substantial exultation. There was an effect, as it were, of light-headedness that was also clear-headedness and the attention to each bodily atmosphere, instead of producing the mental obfuscation, the loss of identity that was a common mental trouble under former conditions, gave simply a new detachment from the bound passions and entanglements of the personal life.

In this story of my brain, restricted youth that I have been telling you, I have sought constantly to convey the narrowness, the intensity, the confinement, muddle, and dusty heat of the old world. It was quite clear to me, within an hour of my awakening, that all that was, in some mysterious way, over and done. That, too, was the common experience. Men stood up; they took the new air into their lungs—a deep, long breath, and the past fell from them, they could long live, they could disregard, they could attempt.

And it was no new thing, no miracle that set aside the former order of the world. It was a change in material conditions, a change in the atmosphere, that at one bound had released them. Some of them it had released to death. Indeed, man himself had changed not at all. We knew before

the Change, the nearest knew, by gloving moments in ourselves and others, by flashes and mists and beautiful things, by hark! luxuriant and splendid states, how far mankind could be, how far almost any human being could upon occasion be, but the poison in the air, in poverty in all the nobler elements which made such moments rare and remarkable—all that had changed. The air was changed, and the Spirit of Man that had drooped and shamed and dreared dull and evil things, awoke, and stood with wonder-clear eyes, refreshed, looking again on life.

IV

The miracle of the awakening came to me in solitude, the laughter, and then the tears. Only after some time did I come upon another man. Until I heard his voice calling, I did not even feel there were any other people in the world. All that seemed past, with all the stresses that were past. I had come out of the individual pit in which my shyness had harked, I had overflowed to all humanity; I had seemed to be all humanity; I had laughed at others as I could have laughed at myself, and this idea that came to me seemed like the coming of an unexpected thought in my own mind. But when it was repeated I answered "I am here," said the voice, and I descended into the fire forthwith, and so came upon Michael, sitting near the ditch with his back to me.

Some of the incidental sensory impressions of that morning blare deeply into my mind that I verily believe, when, at last, I face the greater mystery that is beyond the life, when the things of this life fade from me as the mists of the morning fade before the sun, these irrelevant, pety details will be the last to leave me, will be the last wisps visible of that attenuating veil. I believe, for instance, I could match the fur upon the collar of his great motoring coat now, could paint the chilled stage of his big cheek with his fair eyebrows just catching the light and showing beyond. His hat was off, his domed-shaped head, with its smooth hair between red and extreme brown, was bent forward in acuteness of his twisted feet. His back seemed enormous. And there was something about



THE AWAKENING CAME WITH THE SHOUTS

the more massive sight of him that filled me with shudders.

"What's wrong?" said I.

"I say," he said, in his full deliberate tones, straight round to see me and showing a profile, a well-modulated nose, a sensitive, clumsy, big lip, known to every curmudgeon in the world, "I'm in a fix. I tell and wretched my ankle. Where are you?"

I walked round him and stood looking at his face. I perceived he had his garters and socks and boots off, the master garrison had been cast aside, and he was knuckling the injured part in an explanatory manner with his thick thumbs.

"By Jove?" I said, "you're *Melampus*!"

"Melampus?" He thought. "That's me, man," he said, without looking up. "But it doesn't affect my ankle."

We remained silent for a few moments except for a grunt of pain from him.

"Do you know?" I asked, "what has happened to things?"

He seemed to complete his diagnosis. "It's not broken," he said.

"Do you know," I repeated, "what has happened to everything?"

"No," he said, looking up at me in curiously for the first time.

"There's some difference——"

"There's a difference?" He smiled, a smile of unexpected pleasure, and an interest was coming into his eyes. "I've been a little preoccupied with my own internal sensations. I remark an extraordinary brightness about things. Is that it?"

"That's part of it. And a queer feeling, a clear-headedness——"

He surveyed me and meditated gravely. "I woke up," he said, feeling his way in his memory.

"And I——"

"I lost my way—I forgot quite how. There was a cushion green fog." He stared at his foot, reverberating. "Something to do with a comet. I was by a hedge in the darkness. Tried to run. Then I must have patched into this lane. Look!" He pointed with his head. "There's a moleskin tail over-breaker there. I must have stumbled over that out of the field above." He scrutinized this and concluded, "Yes."

"It was dark," he said, "and a sort of green gas came out of nothing everywhere. That is the last I remember."

"And then you woke up?" So did I—

in a state of great bewilderment. Certainly there's something odd in the air. I was—I was rushing along a road in a motor car, very much excited and preoccupied. I got down——" He held out a triumphant finger. "I *knocked*!"

"Now I've got it! We'd struck our fleet from here to Tread. We'd got right across them, and the *Elba* missed. We'd lost the *Lord Warden*. By Jove, you! The *Lord Warden*! A battleship that cost two million pounds—and that fool Ratty said a dozen names! Eleven hundred men were down. I remember now. We were sweeping up the North Sea like a net, with the North Atlantic fleet waiting at the Foreside 'em—and not one of 'em had three days' coal! Now, was that a dream? Not! I told a lot of people as much—nothing was it?—to reassure them. They were workaholics extremely frightened. Queer people—gentry and bald the press—most of them. Where? Of course. We had it all over—a big dinner—oysters—Culchester. I'd been there, just to show all this mad scare was nonsense. And I was coming back here. But it doesn't seem as though that was—wasn't. I suppose it was. You, of course, it was. I got out of my car at the bottom of the rise with the idea of walking along the cliff paths, because everyone said one of these battleships was being chased along the shore. That's clear! I heard their guns——"

He reflected. "Queer I should have supposed! Did you hear any guns?"

I said I had heard them.

"Was it last night?"

"Late last night. One or two in the morning."

He leaned back on his hand and looked at me, smiling frankly. "Even now," he said, "it's odd, but the whole of that seems like a silly dream. Do you think there was a *Lord Warden*? Do you really believe we sank all that machinery—for fun? It was a dream. And yet—it happened."

By all the standards of the former time it would have been remarkable that I talked quite easily and freely with so great a man. "Yes," I said, "that's it. One feels one has awakened from something more than that green gas. As though the other things also weren't quite real!"

He shifted his brows and left the coil of his long thoughts. "I made a speech at Culchester," he said.

I thought he was going to add something more about that, but there lingered a habit of reticence in the man that told him for the moment. "It is a very curious thing," he broke away, "that this pain should be, on the whole, more interesting than disagreeable."

"You are in pain?"

"My ankle! It's either broken or badly sprained—I think sprained; it's very painful to move, but personally I'm not in pain. That sort of general sickness that comes with local injury—not a trace of it!" He moved and remonstrated: "I was speaking at Colchester, and saying things about the war. I began to see it better. The reporter—scribble, scribble. Max Sutcliffe, silly. Hobbies. Compliments about the system. Mine—mine. What was it? About the war? A war that must needs be long and bloody, taking toll from castle and cottage, taking toll? Rhetorical gusto! What I wrote last night?"

His systems packaged. He had drawn up his right knee, his elbow rested thereon and his chin on his fist. The deep-set grey eyes beneath his batch of eyebrows stared at unknown things. "My God!" he murmured; "My God!" with a note of disgust. He made a big, breeding figure in the sunlight, he had an effect of more than physical largeness; he made me feel that it became me to wait upon his thinking. I had never met a man of this sort before; I did not know such men existed.

It is a curious thing that I cannot now recall any idea whatever that I had before the Change about the personalities of statesmen, but I doubt if ever in these days I thought of them at all as tangible, individual human beings, collectively of some intellectual complexity. I believe that my impression was a straightforward blend of caricature and newspaper legend. I certainly had no respect for them. And now without scruple or any indecency whatever, as if it were a first fruit of the Change, I found myself in the presence of a human being toward whom I perceived myself inferior and subordinate, before whom I stood without scruple or any indecency whatever, in an attitude of respect and attention. My indignant, my could opinion—or was it, after all, only the drosses of life?—had never once permitted that before the Change.

He emerged from his thoughts, still with

a faint perplexity in his manner. "That speech I made last night," he said, "was discussed, ramifications, you know. Nothing can alter that. Nothing. No little, fat person in evening dress—gobbling system. Glop!"

It was a most natural part of the wonder of that morning, that he should adopt this incredible note of frankness, and that it should affect nothing from my respect for him.

"Yes," he said, "you are right. It's all indispensible fact, and I can't believe it was anything but a dream."

V

That memory stands out against the dark past of the world with extraordinary clearness and brightness. The air, I remember, was full of the calling and piping and singing of birds. I have a curious persuasion, too, that there was a distant, happy clatter of pealing bells, but that, I am half convinced, is a mistake. Nevertheless, there was something in the brush pile of things, in the dewy overcast of sensations that set bells rejoicing in one's brain. And that long, fat, peasant man sitting on the ground had beauty even in his clumsy pose, as though indeed some Great Master of strength and humor had made him.

And—it is so hard now to carry those things—he spoke to me, a stranger, without reservations, cordially, as men used to speak to men. Before those days, not only did we think badly, but what we thought, a thousand short-sighted conclusions, digests, objective discipline, directions, a hundred hundred aspects of subtilities of soul, made us muffle before we told it to our fellowmen.

"It's all rotting now!" he said, and told me half soliloquizingly what was in his mind.

I wish I could give every word he said to me; he struck out image after image to my innocent intelligence, with truth, broken fragments of speech. If I had a precise, full memory of that morning I should give it you, verbatim, entirely. But here, save for the little sharp things that stand out, I find only blurred general impressions. Throughout, I have to make up again his half-long-winded sentences and speeches, and be content

with giving you the general effect. But I can see and hear him now as he said: "The dream got worse at the end. The war—a perfectly horrible business! Horrible! And it was just like a nightmare, you couldn't do anything to escape from it—everyone was different."

The sense of discretion was gone.

He opened the war out to me—as everyone sees it now. Only, that morning it was overwhelming. He sat there on the ground, absurdly forgetful of his hurt and swollen foot, treating me as the healthiest accessory and as altogether an equal, talking out to himself the great obsessions of his mind. "We could have prevented it. Any of us who chose to speak out could have prevented it. A little decent frankness. What was there to prevent our being frank with one another? Their emperor—his position was a pile of ridiculous assumptions, no doubt, but at bottom he was a sane man." He touched off the emperor in a few pithy words, the German press, the German people, and our own. He put it as we should put it all now, but with a certain heat as of a man half pasty and wholly resentful. "Their damned little buttoned-up pressmen!" he cried, exultantly. "Were there ever such men? And could some of us ought have taken a firmer line. If a lot of us had taken a firmer line and squashed that nonsense early."

He lapsed into maddish whisperings, into silence.

I stared regarding him, understanding him, learning marvellously from him. It is a fact that for the best part of the naming of the Change I forgot Nettie and Vernall as completely as though they were no more than characters in some novel that I had put aside to finish at my leisure, in order that I might talk to this man.

"Eh, well," he said, waking startlingly from his thoughts; "here we are stuck now! The thing can't go on now, all the next end. How it ever began—! My dear boy, how did all these things ever begin? I feel like a new Adam. Do you think this has happened—generally? Or shall we find all these graves and things? Why, course!"

He spoke as if to me, and remembered his talk. He suggested I should help him as far as his bungalow. Then seemed nothing stronger to either of us than that he should register my services or that I should

cheerfully obey. I helped him bandage his ankle, and we set out, I bid you, the two of us making up a sort of limping quadruped, along the winding lane toward the cliffs and the sea.

VI

His bungalow beyond the gold links was, perhaps, a mile and a quarter from the lane. We went down to the beach ramparts and along the pallid, wave-tossed rocks, and we got along by making a smooth hopping, triped dance forward and I began to grope after him, and then, as soon as we could, by sitting down. His ankle was, in fact, broken, and he could not get it to the ground without exquisite pain. So that it took us nearly two hours to get to the house, and it would have taken longer if his butterfly-valve had not come out to assist me. They had found motor car and chauffeur smashed and still at the bend of the road near the house, and had been on that side looking for witnesses, or they would have seen us before.

For most of that time we were sitting now on, but, now on a chalk boulder, now on a flinty gross, and talking one to the other, with the frankness proper to the intercourse of men of good intent, without reservation or aggression, in the concern, open frankness of contemporary intercourse to-day, but which then, nevertheless, was the rarest and strongest thing in the world. He, for the most part, talked, but at some shape of a question I told him—as plainly as I could tell of persons that had, for a time, become incomprehensible to me—of my murderous pursuit of Nettie and her lover, and how the great experts overcame me. He watched me with green eyes and nodded understandingly, and afterward he asked me here, persisting questions about my education, my upbringing, my work. There was a differentiation in his manner, broad, full power, that had in them no element of delay.

"You," he said, "you—of course. What a fool I have been!" and said no more until we had made another of our triped struggles along the beach. At first, I did not see the connection of my story with that self accusation.

"Suppose," he said, pausing on the gross, "there had been such a thing as a *casus belli*!"



STRANGERS ON EARTH THAT DAY, IN THE RANKS OF EXPATRIATE WHO BREATHED, THERE HAD BEEN THE SAME RUMBLE IN THE AIR, THE SAME RUSH OF GREEN VAPOR, THE CRESTATION, THE STREAMING DOWN OF SHOOTING STARS.

He turned to me. "If one had decided all the medals should end! If one had taken it, as an artist takes his clay, as a man who builds takes stone and stone, and made"—he flung out his big, broad hand at the glories of sky and sea, and drew a deep breath—"something is it that setting?"

He added in explanation, "Then there wouldn't have been such names as yours at all, you know."

"Tell me more about it," he said, "all we all about yourself. I feel all these things have passed away, all these things are to be changed forever. You won't be what you have been from this time forth. All the things you have done—don't matter now. To us, at any rate, they don't matter at all. We have met, who were separated in that darkness behind us. Tell me."

"Yes," he said; and I told my story straight and as frankly as I have told it to you. "And there, where those little clusters of weed rock run out to the side, beyond the headland, a bungalow village. What did you do with your past?"

"I left it lying there—among the barks." He glanced at me from under his light eyebrows. "It others feel like you and I," he said, "there'll be a lot of places left among the barks to-day."

So we talked, I and that great strong man, with the look of brotherhood so plain between us it needed not a word. Our souls went out to each other in such good faith, never before had I had anything but a guarded watchfulness for any fellow-man. Still I set him, upon that wild, desolate beach of the old side—I set him lowing against the melancholy boughs of a grove, looking down at the poor, drowned sailor whose body we presently found. For we found a newly drowned man who had chance just to meet this great down in which we rejoiced. We found him lying in a pool of water, among low-lying weeds in the dark shadow of the thicketage. You must not overrate the horrors of the former days; in those days it was extremely more common to see death in England than it would be to-day. This dead man was a sailor from the *Rhein Adler*, the great German battleship that had we but known it—say not four miles away along the coast, amidst blown-up mountains of chalk rocks, a torn and battered mass of machinery, wholly submerged at high water, and half

up in an intertissued mass hundred drowned brave men, all strong and stalwart, all once capable of doing these things.

I remember that poor boy very vividly. He had been drowned during the asphyxiation of the green gas. His fair young face was quiet and calm, but the skin of his chest had been crushed by suddenly water and his right arm was bent queerly back. Even to that needless death and all its tale of cruelty, beauty and dignity had come. "Everything flowed together in significance as we stood there, I, the ill-clad, cheaply equipped primitivist, and Melmont's his great far-trimmed coat—he wet but with willing but he had not thought to remove it—bearing upon the clammy ground and paying this poor victim of the war he had helped to make. "Poor lad!" he said, "poor lad!" A child we blundered out to death! Do look at the quiet beauty of that face, that body—so he flung aside like that!"

(I remember that near this dead man's hand a stranded starfish writhed in slowly failing life, struggling back toward the sea. It left grooved tracks in the sand.)

"There must be no more of this," passed Melmont, leaning on my shoulder, "no more of this."

But most, I recall Melmont as he talked a little later, sitting upon a great chalk boulder with the sunlight on his big, perspiration-drenched face. He made his resolve. "We must end this," he said, in that full whisper of his; "it is stupid. With so many people able to read and think—even as it is—there is no need of anything of the sort. Gods! What have we taken here at? Drowsing like people in a stifling room, too dull and sleepy and too close toward one another for anyone to get up and open the window. What hasn't we been at?"

A great powerful figure he sits there still in my memory, perplexed and assailed at himself and all things. "We must change all this," he repeated, and threw out his broad hands in a powerful gesture against the sea and sky. "We have done so weakly—braves alone know why?" I can see him now, queer giant that he looked on that desolate beach of splendor, the sea birds flying about us and that crumpled death hand by, no bad symbol in his clamorous and needless hand of the untroubled powers of the former life. I



ON THE HIGH SEAS THE CROWDING STEAMSHIP PASSENGERS WERE DIVIDED; THE
RESCUE THROWN UPON THEM WAS UNTERRED



THE RESIDENT WITH THE LIQUID DUST, AND ULTRASOUND WITH GUNPOWDER PISTOLS

remember it as an integral part of that picture that, far away across the sandy stretches, one of those white estate boards I have described stuck up a little ajar amidst the yellow-green turf upon the crest of the low cliff.

He talked with a sort of wonder of the former things. "Has it ever dawned upon you to imagine the position—the perilous—of every soul concerned in a declaration of war?" he asked. He went on, as though speech was necessary to make it credible, to describe Laycock, who then gave the harrow words at the cabinet council, "an unlettered Oxford grad with a hoarse voice and a gilding of Greek—the sort of little fool who is brought up on the admiration of his older sisters.

"All the time about," he said, "I was watching him—thinking what an ass he was to be trusted with man's lives. I might have done better to have thought that of myself. I was doing nothing to prevent it all. The damned little intellect was up to his neck in the drama of the things he liked to trumpet out; he goggled round at us. 'There it is now!' he said. Rutherford shrugged his shoulders. I made some slight protest and gave in. Afterwards I discussed of him.

"What a lot we were! All a little scared at ourselves—all, as it were, instrumental. 'And it's looks like that lead to things like this!' He jerked his head at that dead man near by us.

"It will be interesting to know what has happened to the world. The green vapor—space stuff. But I know what has happened to me. It's Conversion. Pre-
-

ways known. But this is being a fool. Talk! I'm going to stop it."

He motioned to me with his clutched, outstretched hands.

"Stop what?" said I, stepping forward instinctively to help him.

"Wuz," he said in his great whisper, putting his big hand on my shoulder but making no further attempt to rise. "I'm going to put an end to war—in any sort of war! And all these things that must end. The world is beautiful, life is great and splendid, we had only to lift up our eyes and see. Think of the glories through which we have been driving, like a herd of sheep in a green place. The color in life—the sounds—the shapes! We have had our jealousies, our quarrels, our ticklish rights, our enviable positions, our vulgar enterprises and sluggish timetables, we have chattered and picked one another and fouled the world—like chaws in the temple, like useless birds in the holy place of God. All my life has been foolishness and pettiness, gross pleasures and mean indelicacies—all. I am a mangle, dark thing in the morning's glow, a pestilence, a shame! And but for God's mercy I might have died this night—like that poor lad there—against the squall of my soul! No more of that! No more of this!—whether the whole world has changed or no, matters nothing. We are here now this day!"

He paused.

"I will arise and go unto my Father," he began presently, "and will say unto him—"

His voice died away in an inaudible whisper. His hand tightened painfully on my shoulder and he rose.

CHAPTER THE SECOND—THE AWAKENING

I

SO the great Day came to me. And there as I had awokened so in that same dawn the whole world awoke.

For the whole world of living things had been overtaken by the same tide of insensibility, in an hour, at the touch of this new gas in the atmosphere, the drivers of catalytic change had passed about the globe. They say it was the nitrogen of

the air, the old azote, that in the twinkling of an eye was changed out of itself, and in an hour or so became a respirable gas, differing indeed from oxygen, but helping and sustaining its action, a bath of strength and healing for nerve and brain. I do not know the precise changes that occurred, or the names our chemists give them. My work has carried me away from such things; only this I know—I and all men were renewed.

I picture to myself this thing happening in space, a planetary movement, the faint thud, the slender whid of motion, draw-

ing nearer to this planet—this planet like a ball, like a shaded, rounded ball, floating in the void, with its little, nearly imperceptible, coat of cloud and air, with its dark pools of ocean, its gleaming ridges of land. And as that ridge from the void touches it, the transparent, gaseous outer shell clouds in an instant green and then slowly close again.

Thereafter, for three hours or more—we know the exact time, for the Change was almost exactly three hours, because all the clocks and watches kept going—everywhere, no man or beast or bird or any living thing that breathes the air stirred at all but lay still.

Everywhere on earth that day, in the case of everyone who breathed, there had been the same burning in the air, the same rash of green vapors, the evaporation, the streaming down of shooting stars. The Hindus had stayed the morning's work in the fields to stare and marvel and fall; the blue-clothed Chinese fell headlong without the middle level of rice; the Japanese merchant came out from some chattering in his office amazed, and presently lay there before his door; the evening gates by the Golden Gates were overtaken as they waited for the rising of the great star. This had happened in every city of the world, in every lonely valley, in every house and house and shelter and every open plaza. On the high seas, the crowding steamership passengers, eager for any wonder, gaped and marvelled, and were suddenly terror-stricken, and struggled for the gangways and were overcome; the captain staggered on the bridge and fell, the officer fell headlong among his coils, the engines thrashed upon their way unsteered, the tilting craft drove by without a haul, with swaying rudder, heeling and dipping.

The great wave of material fate cried Halt! And in the midst of the play the action staggered, dropped, and was still. The figure ran from my pen. In New York that very thing occurred. Most of the theatrical audiences dispersed, but in two crowded houses the company, fearing a panic, went on playing amidst the ghosts, and the people, roused by many a previous disaster, stuck to their seats. There they sat, the back rows only moving a little, and there, in disciplined lines, they dropped and folded, nodded, and fell forward or slid down upon the floor.

I am told by Parkard—though indeed I know nothing of the reasoning on which his confidence rests—that within an hour of the great moment of impact the first green modification of nitrogen had dissolved and passed away, leaving the air as transparent as ever. The rest of that wonderful intellect was clear, had any had eyes to see its clearness. In London it was right, but in New York, for example, people were in the full bustle of the evening's enjoyment; in Chicago they were sitting down to dinner; the whole world was abroad. The moonlight must have lit streets and squares, flooded with crumpled figures, through which such electric cars as had no automatic brakes had plowed on their way until they were stopped by the fallen bodies. People lay in their dress clothes, in dining-rooms, restaurants, on platforms, in halls, everywhere just as they had been overcome. Men gambling, men drinking, women lurking in hidden places, silent couples, were caught, to arise with weak and naked and consciousness amidst the disorder of their sin. America the comet reached in the full tide of evening life, but Britain lay asleep.

But as I have told, Britain did not share her so deeply but that she was in the full tide of what might have been battle and a great victory. Up and down the North Sea her warships swept together like a net about their foes. On land, too, that night was to have decided great issues. The German camps were under arms from Redditch to Blackfriars, their infantry columns were lying in ranks like green hay, in arrested eight march on every track between Langley and Thamey, and between Arncourt and Douai. The hills beyond Spincourt were dotted thick with hidden French riflemen, the thin lash of the French skirmishers scattered out amidst spades and unbroken rifle pits in coils that wrapped about the heads of the German columns, flinging along the Vosges watershed and out across the frontier near Belfort nearly to the Rhine.

The Hungarians, the Italian peasant, yawned and thought the morning dark, and turned over to fall into a dreamless sleep; the Mohammedan world spread its carpet and was taken in prayer. And in Sydney, in Melbourne, in New Zealand, the thing was a fog in the afternoon, that scattered the crowds on race courses and cricket fields,

and stopped the unloading of shipping; and brought men out from their afternoon rest to stagger and litter the streets.

II

My thoughts go into the woods and wildernesses and jungles of the world, to the wild life that shared man's suspension, and I think of a thousand rural arts interrupted and truncated, frozen, as it were, like the frozen woods Pusignuel met at sea. Not only men, it was that were quivered, but all living creatures that breathe the air became insensate, impulsive things. Motionless brutes and birds lay amidst the drooping trees and herbage in the universal twilight. The tiger sprawled beside his fresh-striken victim, who died to death in a dreamless sleep. The very flies came sailing down the air with wings outspread; the spider hung suspended in his bowld nest, like some gaudy painted snowflake the butterfly defiled to earth and groundied, and was still. And, as a queer contrast, one gaffers that the fishes in the sea suffered not at all.

Speaking of the fishes reminds me of a queer little knot upon that great world-dreaming. The odd fate of the crew of the submarine vessel *St. George* has always seemed incomparable to me. So far as I know, they were the only men alive who never saw that veil of green drawn across the world. All the while that the stillness held above, they were working into the mouth of the Elbe, past the booms and the mines, very slowly and carefully, a monster crustacean of steel, explosive crusted, along the rapidly bottom. They trudged a long day that was to grieve their fellows from the mother ship floating awash outside. Then, in the long distance beyond the foats, they came up at last to mark down their victims and get on. That must have been before the twilight of dawn, for they tell of the brightness of the stars. They were assured to find themselves not three hundred yards

from an ironclad that had run ashore in the mud, and flooded over with the falling tide. It was also visible, but no one needed that—no one in all that strange, clear silence needed that—and, not only this wrecked vessel, but all the dark ships lying about them, it seemed to their perplexed and startled minds, must be full of dead men!

There I think must have been one of the strangest of all experiences. They were never knowable; at once, and, I am told, with a sudden catch of laughter, they began to breathe the new air. None of them had proved a writer; we have no picture of their wonder, no description of what was said. But we know these men were active and awake for an hour and a half, at least, before the general awakening came, and when at last the Germans stirred and set up, they found these strangers in possession of their battleship, the submarine carelessly adrift, and the Englishmen, begrimed and weary, but with a sort of farious exultation, still hung, in the bright dawn, mounting immobile masses from the sinking configuration.

But the thought of certain sailors the sailors of the submarine tilted altogether to one, brings me back to the strand of grotesque horror that runs through all the event, the strand I cannot overlook for all the splendors of human well-being that have come down it. I cannot forget the unguided ships that drove ashore, that went down in disaster with all their sleeping hands, nor have, placed, never any rushed to destruction upon the coasts, and trails upon the midway kept on in spite of signals, to be found at last by their owners, reviving, drivers standing on unfamiliar banks, their lives exhausted, or, less lucky, to be discovered by automated pensiles or awakening porters, unshod and unclad, piled up into heaps of smoking, crackling mass. The boundary fire of the Four Towns still blazed, the smoke of our burning still filled the sky. Fires burned indeed the brighter for the Change—and sped.

(To be continued)





In the Days of the Comet

BY H. G. WELLS

Illustrated by Harry Lowe

BOKK TITR. SECOND—THE GREEN VAPORS

CHAPTER THE SECOND—THE AWAKENING—(CONTINUED)

SIXTY-NINE. The present instalment deal with happenings in England just before the Great Change when a huge comet is threatening to come in contact with the earth. In addition to hard times and general discontent, with varying social conditions, England has gone to war with Germany. The namesake, William Leedford, has become a member through the influence of his friend Verrell. This moves back to the beginning of Leedford's acquaintance with Nettie Verrell. The young man still loves the girl and when she comes with Edward Verrell, the son of his father's stepson, to follow the copper to a resort on the Lake coast, there to prepare to kill the lobes with the needles. But the shore goes wild, and just then the earth, moving into the planet's path, is enveloped in a gas which renders every living being unconscious. This will last a few hours. The narrative continues with the awaking effect of the gas, which brings about the Great Change.

III

PICTURE, to yourself what happened between the printing and composing of the copy of the "New Paper" that lies before me now. It was the first newspaper that was printed upon earth after the Great Change. It is pocket-wore and bound, made of a paper no man ever intended for preservation. I found it on the arbor table in the tea-garden while I

was waiting for Nettie and Verrell, before that first conversation of which I have proudly to tell. As I look at it all the scene comes back to me, and Nettie stands in her white raiment against a bluish-green background of earthy gardens, whitening my face as I read.

It is so layed that the best cracks along the folds and creases to pieces in my hands. It lies upon my desk, a dead scorpion of the dead ages of the world, of the earliest past, of my heart. I know we discussed its news, but for the life of me I cannot recall what we said, only I remember that

Notic and very little, and that Verrill for a time read it over my shoulder. And I did not like him to read over my shoulder.

The department belief we must have helped us through the first awkwardness of that meeting.

But of all that we said and did then I must tell in a later chapter.

It is easy to see the "New Paper" had been set up overnight, and then large pieces of the stereo plates replaced subsequently. I do not know enough of the old methods of printing to know precisely what happened. The thing gives me an impression of large plates of type having been cut away and replaced by fresh blocks. There is something very rough and ready about it all, and the new portions print darker and more suddenly than the old except toward the left, where they have passed ink and indented. A friend of mine, who knows something of the old typography, has suggested to me that the machinery actually in use for the "New Paper" was damaged that night, and that on the meeting of the Change, Bangsford borrowed a neighboring office—perhaps in financial dependence upon him—to print in.

The outer page belongs entirely to the old period. The only parts of the paper that had undergone alteration were the two middle leaves. Here we found, set forth in a curious little four column oblong of print, what was necessary. This cut across a column with were headings beginning, "Great Naval Battle Now in Progress. The Fall of Two Empires in the Balance, Reported Loss of Two More—."

These things, are printed, were beneath notice now. Probably it was government, and fabricated news in the first instance.

It is curious to piece together the worn and frayed fragments, and reveal this disclosed but intelligent of the new epoch.

The simple, clear statement in the replaced portion of the paper impressed me at the time, I remember, as bold and strange, in that framework of cheating, bad English. Now they seem like the voice of a sane man amidst a vast field of violence. But they witness to the present recovery of London from the gas; the new, with energy of rebound in this huge population.

The catalytic wave must have caught the

place in full swing, in its nocturnal high fever, infused it in a quite exceptional state of fever, what with the comet and the war, and most particularly with the war. Very probably the Change crept into the office imperceptibly, amidst the noise and shouting, and the glare of electric light that made the night atmosphere in that place. There the green flames may have passed undetected there and the preliminary discerning trials of green vapor seemed no more than unconscious, drifting ways of London fog.

If there was any sounding for them, it must have been a sudden, universal tumult in the street, and then a much more universal quiet. They could have had no other intention.

There was no time to stop the press. Below, the main development of green vapor had overwhelmed everyone. It must have folded about them, tunneled them to the south, reached and killed them. My imagination is always curiously stirred by the thought of that, because I suppose it is the last picture I succeeded in making for myself of what had happened in the town. It has never quite lost its strangeness for me that when the Change came, machinery went on working. I don't precisely know why that should have seemed so strange—but, but it did, and still, to a certain extent, does. One is so accustomed, I suppose, to regard machinery as an extension of human personality, that the extent of its autonomy the Change displayed came as a shock to me. The electric lights, for example, hazy-generalized article, must have gone on burning, at least for a time; amidst the thickening darkness the huge presses must have roared on, printing, folding, throwing aside copy after copy of that interminable battle report with its queer column of battle headlines, and all the place must have still quivered and throbbed with the familiar roar of the engines. And this though no man ruled them at all any more. Here and there beneath that thickening fog, the crumpled or crumpled forms of men lay still.

A wonderful thing that must have seemed, had any man had, by chance, the power of resistance to the vapor, and could be have walked amidst it.

And soon the machines must have exhausted their load of ink and paper, and thumped and banged and rattled empty



THAT AWAKENING WENT ABOUT THE EARTH. IT CAME TO EVERYONE, NEAR OR, AND FOR THE TIME QUITE FORGOTTEN BY, NEARLY ALL BETTER WERE—WORSE THAN EACH OTHER.

amidst the general quiet. Then, I suppose, the furnaces failed for want of fueling, the steam pressure fell in the pipes, the machinery slackened, the lights burned dim, and came and went with the ebb of energy from the power station. Who can tell precisely the sequence of these things now?

And then, you know, amidst the weakening and increasing nooses-of-men, the green vapor cleared and vanished; in an instant, indeed, it had gone, and it may be a broken shiver and blow and went about the earth.

And then came the first flush of morning, the first rustlings of the world. Perhaps, in that office, the flammes of the lamps were still glowing, the machinery was still pulsing weakly, when the crumpled, booted legs of cloth became once again, and began to stir and rise. The chapel of the printers was, no doubt, shocked to find itself asleep. Amidst that dazzling dawn the "New Paper" woke in wonder, stood up and blinked at its amazing self.

The clocks of the city churches, one passing another, struck four. The staff, crumpled and disheveled, but with a strange refreshment on their veins, stood about the damaged machinery, marvelling and quizzing; the editor read his over-night headlines with incredulous laughter. There was much involuntary laughter that morning. Outside, the mail-men paraded the streets, and rubbed the knees, of their aching horses.

Then, you know, sleep; and with much conversation and doubt, they set about to produce the paper.

Imagine those fatigued, perplexed people, carried on by the inertia of their old appetites, and driving their bent with an enterprise that had suddenly become altogether extraordinary and stuporous. They worked amidst querulousness, and yet light-heartedly. At every stage there must have been interruptions for discussion.

IV

Then let me give you a vivid little impression. I recollect of a certain prosaic person, a grocer named Wiggins, and how he passed through the Change. I heard this man's story in the post office at Marion, when, on the afternoon of the First Day, I telegraphed to telegraph to my mother. The place was also a grocer's

shop, and I found him and the proprietor talking as I went in. They were trade competitors; and Wiggins had just come across the street to break the hostile silence of a score of years. The sparkle of the Change was in their eyes, their slightly flushed cheeks, their more elastic gestures, spoke of new physical robustness that had invaded their bones.

"It did us no good, all over here," Mr. Wiggins said to me, explaining the occasion of their encounter, "it did our customers no good. I've come to tell him that. You know that in mind, young man, of ever you come to have a shop of your own. It was a sort of stupid blindness possessed us, and I can't make out we didn't see it before in that light. Not so much downright wickedness it wasn't, as stupidity. A stupid policy! Think of three-hundred human beings within a state's three, who have not spoken for twenty years, harboring one heart against each other!"

"I can't think how we came to such a state, Mr. Wiggins," said the other, packing tea into paper packets out of mere habit as he spoke. "It was wicked pride and obstinacy. We knew it was foolish all the time."

I stood affixing the adhesive stamp to my telegram.

"Only the other morning," he went on to me, "I was cutting French eggs. Selling at a loss to do it. I'd marked down with a great staring pencil to compute a dozen and now it is I went past. Here's my answer!" He indicated a ticket. "'Eight pieces a dozen—same as sold elsewhere for nine-pence.' A whole penny down, bang off! Just a touch above one—if that—and over there—!" He turned over the counter to my impressively, "Not the same eggs!"

"Now, what people in their senses would do things like that?" said Mr. Wiggins.

I sent my telegram—the proprietor dispatched it for me, and, while he did so, I told exchanging experiences with Mr. Wiggins. He knew no more than I did then the nature of the change that had come over things. He had been alighted by the green flashes, he said, so much so that after watching for a time, from behind his bedroom window blind, he had got up and hastily dressed and made his hasty get up also, so that they might be ready for



1 REMEMBER HOW ONCE IN CLAYTON CALIFORNIA CHAPTER 1 HAD HIS SPOTTY, FAT JACK SUPPORTED UNDER THE FLICKERING GAS PLATES-OLD FOLKSTORY. THE IRON-MONGER, REPORT

the end. He made them put on their Sunday clothes. They all went out into the garden together, their minds divided between admiration at the grandeur of the spectacle and a great and growing awe. They were Dissenters, and very religious people out of business hours; and it seemed to them, in these last majestic moments, that, after all, science must be wrong and the human eye right. With the green vapors came conviction, and they prepared to meet their God.

The man, you must understand, was a common-looking man, in his shirt-sleeves and with an open shirt at his wrists, and he told his story in an Anglo-Saxon accent that sounded rough and clipped to my Staffordshire ears; he told his story without a thought of pride, and, as it were, incidentally, and yet he gave me a vision of something heroic.

These people did not run hither and thither as many people did. These four simple, common people stood bended their back down in their garden pathway between the gaudy-yellow bushes, with the tenors of their God and his judgments closing in upon them, swiftly and wonderfully—and then they began to sing. Then they stood, father and mother and two daughters, chanting out steadily, but, no doubt, a little faintly after the manner of their kind—

"*In Zion's Hope abiding,
My soul in triumph sing.*—"

until one by one they fell, and lay still.

The postmaster had heard them in the gathering darkness, "*In Zion's Hope abiding.*"

It was the most extraordinary thing in the world to hear the flushed and happy-faced man telling that story of his recent death. It did not seem at all possible to have happened in the last twelve hours. It was minute and minute, these people who were singing through the darkness to their God. It was like a scene shown to me, very small and very dimly printed, in a book!

But that effect was not confined to this particular thing. A vast number of things that had happened before the coming of the comet, had undergone the same transfiguring reduction. Other people, too, I have learned since, had the same vision, a sense of enlargement. It seems to me

now now that the little dark creature, who had stormed across England in pursuit of Nelly and her lover, must have been about six inches high, that all that passed his allover had been an ill-ill caricature show, acted in the twilight.

V

The figure of my mother comes always into my conception of the Change.

I remember how, one day, she confided herself.

She had been very sleepless that night, she said, and took the ripens of the falling stars for shooting; these had been raining in Clayton and all through Swaffham all day, and so she got out of bed to look. She had a dark sense that I was in all such trouble.

But she was not looking when the Change came.

"When I saw the stars a raining down, dear," she said, "and thought of you out in it, I thought there'd be no harm in saying a prayer for you, dear? I thought you wouldn't mind that."

And so I got another of my pictures—the green vapors come and go, and there by her patched overlet that dear old woman knits and sleeps, still shaping her poor, gaunt hands in the attitude of *Prayer—prayer to IT—for me!*

Through the smoky curtains and blinds of the flower, refracting window I see the stars above the chimneys fide, the pale light of dawn creeps into the sky, and her candle flares and dies.

That, also, went with me through the silence—that silent, headlong figure, that human prayer to God to shield me, silent in a silent world, rushing through the emptiness of space.

VI

With the dawn, that awakening went about the earth. I have told how it came to me, and how I walked in wonder through the transfigured cornfields of Sheepbridge. It came to everyone. Near me, and for the time, claim forgotten by me, Verrell and Nelly walk-walk near each other. Each heard, before all other sounds, the other's voice amidst the silence and the light. And the scattered people who had run in and fro, and fallen on the beach of

the banqueting village, awoke. The sleeping villages of Marcon started, and sat up in their unadorned bedsheets and pajamas, the contorted figure in the garden, with the hymn still upon their lips, strolled amidst the flowers, and thanked each other kindly, and thought of Paradise. My mother found herself crooked against the bed, and rose—was with a glad, inimitable expression of accepted prayer.

Already, when it came to us, the soldiers, crowded between the lines of dusty poplars along the road to Altimont, were chattering and sharing coffee with the French citizens, who had held them from their comfortable hidden pits among the vineyards up the slopes of Boiserville. A certain perplexity had come to these partisans, who had dropped soberly, tensely ready for the rocket that should wake the wine and music of their magnificence. At the sight and sound of the stir and human commotion in the roadway below, it had come to each man individually that he could not shoot. One conceivably, at least, has told his story of his awakening, and how suddenly he thought the rifle there beside him in his pit, how he took it on his knees to examine. Then, as his memory of his purpose grew clearer, he dropped the thing, and stood up with a kind of joyful bound at the crime escaped, to look more closely at the men he was to have assassinated. "Human types," he thought; they looked for such a fate. The succeeding rocket never them. Below, the men did not fall into ranks again, but sat by the roadside, or stood in groups talking, discussing with a novel interest the ostensible cause of the war.

The officers held their own houses, and talked to the men frankly, regardless of discipline. Some Frenchmen out of the rifle-pits came staggering down the hill. Others stood doubtfully, rifles still in hand. Curious from scanned these latter. Little arguments sprang up: "Shoot at 'em Marcon! They're respectable French citizens!" There is a picture of it all, very bright and detailed in the morning light, in the battle gallery amidst the ruins of old Nancy, and one sees the old-world uniform of the "soldier," the odd cap and belt and boots, the ammunition belt, the water bottle, the sort of recruit's pack the man carried, a queer, elaborate equipment. The soldiers had surrounded me by one,

first one and then another. I wonder sometimes whether, perhaps, if the two armies had come awake in an instant, the battle, by mere habit and instinct, might not have begun. But the men who waked first, sat up, looked about them in amazement and had time to think a little.

VII

Everywhere there was laughter, everywhere tears.

Men and women in the common life, finding themselves suddenly fit and enabled, capable of doing what had hitherto been impossible, incapable of doing what had hitherto been irresistible, happy, hopeful, uselessly energetic, rejected altogether the supposition that this was merely a change in the blood and material texture of life. They desired the bodies God had given them, as once the Upper Nile savages struck out their canine teeth, because these made them like the beasts. They declared that this was the coming of a spirit, and nothing else would satisfy their need for explanations. And in a sense the Spirit came. The Great Revival sprung directly from the Change—the last, the deepest, wildest, and most enduring of all the vast invasions of religious emotion that go by that name.

But indeed it differed essentially from its innumerable predecessors. The former revivals were a phase of fever. This was the first movement of health; it was altogether quieter, more intellectual, more private, more religious than any of those others. In the old time, and still especially in the Protestant countries where the things of religion were outspoken, and the absence of confessors and well-trained priests made religious states of emotion explosive and contagious, revulsion upon various scales was a normal phase in the religious life. Revivals were always going on—over a little disturbance of conscience in a village, now an outburst of emotion in a mission room, now a great storm that swept a continent, and now an organized effort that came to town with bands and banners and handbills and water cars for the saving of souls. Never at any time did I take part in, or was I attracted by, any of these movements. My nature, although passionate, was too critical for sleepless if you like, for it awoke to the

same thing) and shy to be drawn into these whirls; but on several occasions Perked and I sat, smiling, but nevertheless disturbed, in the back seats of corduroy meetings.

I saw enough of them to understand their nature, and I am not surprised to learn now that before the comet came, all about the world, even among savages, even among cannibals, these same, or at any rate closely similar, periodic upsurgeings went on. The world was stirring, it was in a fever, and these phenomena were neither more nor less than the instinctive struggle of the organism against the ebb of its powers, the drooping of its veins, the limitation of its life. Invariably, these revivals followed periods of world and restricted being. Men stayed their base, immobile, motionless until the world grew unendurably bare. Some disappointment, some thumping fit up for them—darkly indeed, but yet enough for indistinct vision—the crowded squares, the dark lobbies of life. A sudden disrupt with the intense smallness of the old-world way of living, a realization of sin, a sense of the unworkiness of all individual things, a desire for something comprehensive, uniting, something greater, for wider communions and less isolated things, filled them. Their souls, which were shaped for wider issues, cried out suddenly amidst the petty interests, the narrow prohibitions of life, "Not that not this!" A great portion to escape from the jealous prison of themselves, an articulate, stammering, weeping passion, shook them.

I have seen— I remember how once in Clayton Calvinistic Methodist chapel I saw—his spotty, fat face strangely distorted under the flickering gas flame—old Pullet, the ironmonger, repeat. He went to the form of repentence, a bench reserved for such exhibitions, and stammered out his sorrow and despair for some infidelity—he was a widower—and indeed I can see now how his loose, fat body quivered and trembled with his grief. He passed it over to five hundred people, from whom in common times he had his every thought and purpose. And it is a fact, it shows where reality lay, that we two youngsters laughed not at all at that blithering grime, we did not even think the dust shadow of a smile. We two sat grave and moist—perhaps wondering.

Only afterward and with an effort did we smile.

These old-time revivals were, I say, the cumulative movements of a body that suffocates. They are the closest manifestations from before the Change, of a sense in all men that things were not right. But they were too often but momentary dismissions. Their faces apart, half in incoordinated shouting, gesticulation, tears. They were but flashes of nuttish. Digest of the narrow life, of all banes, took shape in numeroses and however. The quickened and ended the night a hypocrite, prophet despoiled for present; infatuate, it is altogether indisputable, very frequent among peasants; and Azazel went home converted and returned with a satisfied gift. And it was almost universal that the converted should be impatient and impulsive, aware of reason and a sense of expedients, opposed to balance, skill and knowledge. Incontinently full of grace, like that, old wine-skins overflowed, they felt they must burst if once they came into contact with hard fact and wise direction.

So the former revivals spent themselves; but the Great Revival did not spend itself, but grew to be, for the majority of Christians at least, the permanent expectation of the Change. For many, it has taken the shape of an outright declaration that this was the Second Advent. It is not for me to discuss the validity of that suggestion, for nearly all of it has amounted to an echoing broadcasting of all the issues of life.

VIII

One irrelevant memory comes back to me, irrelevant, and yet, by some subtle mark of quality, it summarizes the Change for me. It is the memory of a woman's very beautiful face, a woman with a flushed face and tear-bright eyes who went by me without speaking, save in some secret purpose. I passed her often in the afternoon of the first day, stood by a widow's grave, I went down to Merton to send a telegram to my mother telling her all was well with me. Whether this woman was I do not know, nor whence she came, I never saw her again, and only her face, gleaming with that new and luminous radiance, stands out for me.

But that expression was the world's.

CHAPTER TWO—1901—CONTINUED.

AND what a strange, unexpected thing was that cabinet council at which I was present, the council that was held two days later in Melmoston's bungalow, and which convened the conference to frame the constitution of the World State. I was there because it was convenient for me to stay with Melmoston. I had no desire to go particularly, and there was no one at his bungalow, to which his brother noble invited him, but a secretary and a valet to help him to begin his share of the enormous labors that evidently lay before the rulers of the world. I was absorbed, and as there was not even a photograph available, I went in as soon as his son had been dressed, and sat at his desk to write at his dictation. It is characteristic of the old slackness that went with the spasmodic violence of the old epoch, that the secretary could not use shorthand and that there was no telephone whatever in the place. Every message had to be taken to the village post office in that grocer's shop at Marston, half a mile away.

So I sat in the back of Melmoston's room; the desk had been thrust aside, and I made such memorandum as were needed. At that time his room seemed to me the most beautifully furnished in the world, and I could clearly see the wild cheerfulness of the chair of the sofa on which the great statesman lay just in front of me, the fine oak paper, the red writing-case, the silver aqua-page of the desk I used. I know now that my presence in that room was a strange and remarkable thing, the open door, even the evening and going of Parker the butler, unnoticed. In the old days a cabinet council was a secret conference; secrecy and fastidiousness were in the texture of all public life. In the old days everybody was always buying something back from somebody, being wary and caustic, penetrating, withholding—for the most part, for no reason at all. Almost unnoticed, that money had dropped out of life.

I close my eyes and see those men again, hear their differing voices. First I see

them a little dimly in the odd splendor of daylight, and then concentrated and drawn together amidst the shadow and mystery about shaded lamps. Integral to this and very clear, is the memory of biscuit crumbs and a drop of spilt water, that at first stood shimmering upon, and then sank into, the green tablecloth.

I remember particularly the figure of Lord Adjutant. He came to the bungalow a day before the others, because he was Melmoston's personal friend. Let me describe this statesman to you, this one of the fifteen men who made the last war. He was the youngest member of the government, and an altogether pleasant and sunny man of forty. He had a clear profile to his close gray hair, a smiling eye, a friendly, cheerful voice upon his thin, clear-throated lips, as easy, disarming manner. He had the perfect quality of a man who had fallen easily into a place prepared for him. He had the temperament of what we used to call a philosopher—an indifferent, that is to say, The Change had caught him at his work-and-recreation, fly-fishing; and, indeed, he said, I remember, that he recovered to find himself with his head within a yard of the water's brink. In times of crisis, Lord Adjutant invariably went fly-fishing at the work-end to keep his mind in tune, and when there was no crisis, then there was nothing to bind so much as to do no fly-fishing, and so, of course, as there was nothing to prevent it, he fished. He came, indeed, among other things, to give up fly-fishing altogether. I was present when he came to Melmoston, and heard him say as much; and, by a more naive route, it was evident that he had arrived at the same scheme of inaction as my master. I left them to talk, but afterward I came back to take down their long telegram to their coming colleague. He was, no doubt, as profoundly affected as Melmoston by the Change, but his tricks of civility and keep-and-acceptable humor had survived the Change, and he expressed his altered attitude, his expanded emotions, in a quaint modification of the old-time-man-of-the-world style, with excessive moderation, with a traced humor of the enthusiasm that plagued him.

These fifteen men who ruled the British

people were curiously unlike anything I had expected, and I watched them intently whenever my services were not in request. They made a peculiar class at that time, these English politicians and statesmen, a class that has now completely passed away. In some respects they were unlike the statesmen of any other region of the world, and I do not find that any really adequate account remains of them. Perhaps you are a reader of the old books. If so, you will find them rendered, with a note of hostile suggestion, by Dickens in "Black Doug"; with a mangling of good history and keen ridicule by Disraeli, who ruled among them accidentally by misunderstanding them and placing the court; and all their assumptions are set forth, posthumously, perhaps, but trivially, as far as people of the "permanent official" class saw them, in the novels of Mrs. Humphry Ward. All these books are still in this world and at the disposal of the curious, and, in addition, the philosopher Bagehot and the geographer Horatio Macaulay give something of their method of thinking, the novelist Thackeray skirts the sunny side of their social life, and there are some good passages of irony, personal description, and reminiscence to be found in the "Twentieth Century Reader" from the pen of such writers, for example, as Sidney Lee. But a picture of them as a whole is wanting. Then they were too near and too great; now, very rapidly, they have become incomprehensible.

We common people of the old time based our conception of our statesmen almost entirely on the caricatures that formed the most powerful weapon in political controversy. Like almost every main feature of the old condition of things these caricatures were an unanticipated development; they were a sort of parasitic outgrowth. They presented not only the personalities who led our public life, but the most curiously disfigured conception of that life, in hulking, vulgar, and disreverent aspects that, in the end, came near to destroying entirely all grave and honorable emotion or motion toward the state. The state of Britain was represented nearly always by a red-faced, portly-faced farmer with an enormous belly; that the dream of freedom, the United States, by a cowering, last-faced man in striped trousers and a blue coat. The chief ministers of state were

pikpockets, warthogmen, devils, whales, asses, elephants, and what not; and issues that affected the welfare of millions of men were discussed and judged like a silly in some idiotic pastime. A tragic war in South Africa, that wounded many thousands, impoverished two whole lands, and brought death and disablement to fifty thousand men, was presented as a quiet contest squared between a violent, queer being named Churchill, with an eyeglass, an orchid, and a short temper, and "old Kroon," an obstinate and very caning old man in a shocking bad hat. The conflict was carried through in a mood sometimes of brutal levity, and sometimes of low desolation, the merry picnickers piled big trade congenitally in that salutary equanimity, and behind those features and masked by them, marched Pain, Sorrow, at last, the drawing of the battle opened and revealed—fright and suffering, blinding burning and smoke and shambles. These men had come to fame and power in that atmosphere, and to see that day there was the oddest suggestion in them of actors who have suddenly laid aside grotesque and foolish parts; the poet was wistful from their faces, the poet lay aside.

Even when the presentation was not frankly grotesque and degrading it was entirely misleading. When I read of Laycock, for example, there arises a picture of a large, active, if a little rough-headed, intelligent in a compact, heroic body, insisting that "Goliath" speaks of his that did so much to precipitate humiliations. It fails not at all with the stammering, high-pitched, slightly bald, and very conscience-wracker personage I saw, nor with Melville's contemptuous first description of him. I doubt if the world at large will ever get a proper vision of these men as they were before the Change. Each year, they pass more and more incredibly beyond our intellectual sympathy.

Our estrangement cannot, indeed, rid them of their portion in the past, for it will rob them of any effect of reality. The whole of their history becomes more and more foreign, more and more like some queer, horrific drama played in a foreign tongue. There they stand through their weird metamorphoses of eminence, those pretensions and pretenses, their height proportionately exaggerated by political but-

loss, their faces covered by great, moist, shadowy masks; their voices, muffled in the foolish idiom of public utterance, disguised beyond any semblance to save humanity, roaring and squeaking through the public press. There it stood, the incomprehensible, faded show, a thing left on one side, and now still and deserted by any interest, its many expressions, at last become now as the creation of medieval Venus, the theology of old Byzantium. And they ruled and influenced the lives of nearly a quarter of mankind; these politicians; their domineering masters swayed the world, made much, perhaps, much excitement, and permitted infinite misery.

I saw these men quaked, indeed, by the Change, but still wearing the queer clothing of the old time, the manners and countenances of the old time. If they had changed themselves from the outlook of the old time they still had to make back to it constantly as a common starting point. My interested intelligence was equal to that, so that I think I did, indeed, see them. There was Gorrell-Browning, the chancellor of the duchy; I remember him as a big, round-faced man, the essential meekness and foolishness of whose expression, whose habit of voluminous platitudeous speech, transfused slightly once or twice over the raised spirit within. He struggled with it, he banished himself, and laughed. Suddenly he said simply, intensely—it was a moment for everyone of class, dear pain: "I have been a vain and self-indulgent, and presumptuous old man. I am of little use here. I have given myself to politics and intrigue, and life is gone from me." Then for a long time he sat still. There was Carton, the Jew chancellor, a white-faced man with understanding; he had a heavy, shaven face that might have stood among the busts of the Caesars, a firm, elaborating voice, with self-confidence, slightly oblique, and triumphant lips, and a momentary, voluntary, bantering smile. "We have to fugue," he said. "We have to fugue—even ourselves."

These two were at the top corner of the table, so that I saw them best well. Mardon, the home secretary, a smaller man with wrinkled eyebrows and a frozen smile on his thin, dry mouth, came next to Carton. He contributed little to the discussion save intelligent comments, and when the electric lights above glowed out,

the shadow deepened quickly in his eyesocket and gave him the quizzical expression of an ironical godkin. Next to him was that great peer, the Earl of Richever, whose self-enclosed indifference had accepted the rôle of a twentieth-century British-Roman patrician of culture, who had divided his time almost equally between his jockey, politics, and the composition of literary studies in the key of his life. "We have done nothing worth doing," he said. "As for me, I have cut a figure!" He reflected—no doubt on his ample patrician years, on the fine, great houses that had been his setting, the twining rose curtains that had roared his name, the enthusiastic meetings he had fed with fine hopes, the futile Olympus beginnings. "I have been a fool," he said compactly. They bowed him in a sympathetic and respectful silence.

Garter, the chancellor of the exchequer, was partially concealed, so far as I was concerned, by the back of Lord Adelham. Ever and again Garter protruded into the discussion, swaying forward, a deep throaty voice, a big nose, a coarse mouth with a drooping, creased lower lip, eyes peering amidst folds and wrinkles. He made his confession for his race. "We Jews," he said, "have gone through the system of this world, creating nothing, consolidating many things, destroying much. Our racial self-conceit has been monstrous. We seem to have used our ample, coarse intellectuality for no other purpose than to develop and master and maintain the conservation of property, to turn life into a sort of mercantile chase and spend our whilights greedily. We have had no sense of service in mankind. Beauty, which is godhead—we made it a possession."

One got a queer impression that except perhaps for Garter or Rived these men had not particularly wanted the power they held; had desired to do nothing very much in the positions they had secured. They had found themselves in the cabinet, and until this moment of illumination they had not been ashamed; but they had made no expressively fine show about the matter. Eight of the fifteen came from the same school, had gone through an entirely parallel education—one Greek Bilingual, some elementary mathematics, some encyclopedic "science," a little history, a little reading

in the silences of kindly orthodox English literature of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. All eight had learned the same dull performance tradition of behavior; externally logical, unimaginative—such as *she* knew, would never act in it, a tradition apt to doctor into sentiment at a crisis and make a great virtue of a simple duty rather than duty done. None of these eight had made any real acquaintance with *me*. They had lived in blisters, they had both passed from nurse to governess, from governess to preparatory school, from Eton to Oxford, from Oxford to the political-social routine. Even their voices and hopes had been according to certain assumptions of good form. They had all gone to the same assumption from Eton, had all cut up to town from Oxford to see life—mass-hall life—but had all come to last again. Now suddenly they discovered their limitations.

"What are we to do?" asked Mélissa.
"We have recklessly this empire in our hands—?" There was silence between

silences of all the things I have to tell of the old order, but, indeed, I saw it with my eyes, I heard it with my ears. It is a fact that this group of men who constituted the government of one-fifth of the habitable land of the earth, who ruled over a million of armed men, who had such services to mankind had never seen before, whose empire of nations, tongues, peoples still dazzles in these greater days, had no concern, the whatever of what they meant to do with the world. They had been a government for three long years, and before the Emperor came to them, it had never even occurred to them that it was necessary to have a common idea. There was no common idea still. That great empire was no more than a thing which, an useless thing that ate and drank and slept and had aims, and was moderately proud of itself because it had claimed to happen. It had no plan, no intention; it meant nothing at all. And the other great empire which, perfectly adult like native men, was in the self-same case.

(To be continued.)



Her Garden

BY CHARLOTTE BECKER

Passes, that were her thoughts, run not here,
Roses, that were her dreams, their perfume shed,
Tall trees, she used, with o'erhand,
And many blossoms, that she snaked on, her
Thick stalks in weaker pride; while, sweet and clear,
The blossoms all the roses with wane thread—
Not wistfully, as those who mourn their dead,
But glad as if her presence hovered near.

And who shall doubt but that the day returns
To breathe the fragrance of her blossomed bower,
And whisper amongst roses and the fern,
Where her white bower once opened like the flowers;
On that, each year, when earth is warm with spring,
Somewhere she walks apart—remembering.



In the Days of the Comet

BY H. G. WELLS

Illustrated by Maxi Egan

BOOK THE SECOND—THE GREY FLOWERS

CHAPTER THE THIRD—THE CABINET CIRCLE.—[CONTINUED]

INTERESTING the previous incidents and high happenings in England just before the Great Change, when a large comet of incalculable size came in contact with the earth. In addition to hard times and general dislocation, with existing social conditions, England has gone to war with Germany. The captain, William Lethbridge, has become a soldier through the influence of his friend Purdon. This may lead to the breaking of Lethbridge's engagement to Nelly Stace. The young man will have the girl, and when she goes with Edward Purdon, the son of his father's employer, he follows the couple to a point on the Fleet road. Here he attempts to kill the horses with his revolver. But the shot goes wild, and just then the earth, rolling upon the comet's path, is enveloped in gas, which renders every living being unconscious. The state has a few hours. Humanity then wakes to a changed world. She finds that they have new aims, new ambitions, new desires.

III

REMEMBER as one thing that struck me very much at the time the absence of any diversity, any difference of opinion, about the broad principles of our present state. These men had true faith in a system of current and inspired motives, loyalty to a party, loyalty to various secret agreements and understandings, loyalty to the mass. They had all been capable

of the lowest attention to procedure, all capable of the most complete suppression of objective doubts and inquiries, all had their religious emotion under perfect control. They had seemed protected by an inviolate but mysterious barrier from all the harsh and destructive speculations, the socialist, republican, and communistic theories that are now off times through the history of the last days of the comet. But now it was as if, in the very moment of the awakening, these barriers and defenses had vanished, as if the great vapors had washed through their minds, and th-

solved and swept away a hundred more rigid boundaries and obstacles. They had admitted and assimilated at once all that was good in the discredited prophecies that had clamored so vehemently and rankly at the doors of their minds in the former days. It was exactly like the awakening from an absurd and haunting dream. They had come out together naturally and inevitably upon the broad daylight platform of obvious and reasonable agreement upon which we and all the order of our world now stand.

Let me try to give the chief things that had vanished from their minds. There was, first, the ancient system of "ownership" that made each an extraordinary master of our administration of the land upon which we lived. In the old time no one believed in that as either just or ideally convenient, but everyone accepted it. The community which lived upon the land was supposed to have waived its necessary connection with the land, except in certain limited instances of highway and crosses. All the rest of the land was cut up in the swaddling way into patches and strips and triangles of various sizes between a hundred square miles and a few acres, and placed under the nearly absolute government of a series of administrators called *landholders*. They owned the land almost as a man now does his hat; they bought it and sold it, and cut it up like cheese or bread; they were free to ruin it, or leave it waste, or encrust upon it horrible and devastating expenses. If the community needed a road or a bridge, if it wanted a town or a village in any position, nay even if it wanted to go to and fro, it had to do the most tortuous treaties with each of the monarchs whose territory was involved. No man could find foothold on the face of the earth until he had paid tall and homage to one of them. They had practically no relations and no duties to the general, municipal, or national government except where larger areas there now dominate in.

The second, I know, like a master's dream, but mankind was that master. And not only in the old countries of Europe and Asia, where this system had arisen out of the national delegation of land control to territorial magnates, who had, in the universal baseness of those times, at last altogether created and escaped their slaves,

did it obtain, but the "new countries," as we called them then—the United States of America, the Cape Colony, Australia, and New Zealand—spent much of the nineteenth century in the frantic giving away of land forever to any casual person who would take it. Was there oil, was there petroleum or gold, was there rich oil or harborage, or the site for a fine city, there claimed and within governments cited out for themselves, and a storm of shabby, tricky, and violent controversies set out to found a new section of the landed aristocracy of the world. After a brief century of hope and pride, the great Republic of the United States of America, the hope, as it was dreamed, of mankind, became, for the most part, a shifting crowd of landless men, landholders and otherwise lost, food lands (for the land is food) and mineral lands ruled its life, gave it surrenders as one gave over to a mercenary, and spent its resources upon such wars, treaty, and foolish豪奢 as the world had never seen before. Here was a thing none of these statesmen before the Change would have regarded as anything but the natural order of the world, which not one of them now regards as anything but the mad and vanished illusions of a period of dreams.

And so it was with the question of the land, so was it also with a hundred other systems and institutions and complicated and dangerous factors in the life of man. They spoke of trade, and realized for the first time there could be buying and selling that was no loss to any man. They spoke of industrial organization, and one saw it under captains who sought no base advantages. The basis of old associations, of personal entanglements, and habitual negotiations had been dispelled from every stage and process of the social training of men. They, long besides, oppressed deserved with an insuring, harsh, and relations. Those men who had overthrown kings, and the old moulds of schools and colleges, books and treatises, the old fumbler, half-figurative, half-formed training of the churches, the complex of weakening and confusing superstition and heresy, sensed which the pride and honor of adult-men desired and worshipped and felt, became nothing but a cause, and pleasure, faded memory. "There must be a common training of the

young," said Richeson, "a hard nation. We have not so much educated them as broken them down, and set traps. And it might have been so easy—it can all be done so easily."

That hangs in my memory as the return of that council. "It can all be done so easily"; but when they said it then, it came

to me. A truce had already been arranged by Melissene, and these visitors, after some nervous remonstrance, set aside the matter of peace as a mere question of particular arrangement. The whole scheme of the world's government had become fluid and provisional in their minds in small details as in great.



“LUCIFER AND DEMON, THEIR CROWN OF FLOWERS BROKEN, WITH THE SPLENDID BLOOMS OVER THE LAND TURNED TO DUST.”

to me now with a quality of enormous refreshment and power. It can all be done so easily, given frankness, given courage. That was when these plotters had the frankness and wonder of a gospel.

In the enlarged outlook the war with the Germans—that nation, heroic, armed female, Germany, had vanquished them men's imagination—was a mere enhanced ap-

“What are the new needs?” said Melissene. “The world is too noble to handle. We're beginning again. Well, let us begin afresh.”

III

“Let us begin afresh.” The pieces of broken, scattered, now seemed then to me

instant with change, the softness of woods. My heart went out to him as he spoke. It was, indeed, that day as tragic as it was violent, we did not at all see the form of what we were then beginning. All that we saw was the clear *inevitability*—that the old order should end.

And then, in a little space of time, marked in halting but effortful brotherhood was sprung out to make its world anew. Those early years, those first and second decades of the new epoch, were in their daily detail a time of rejoicing with us—a chiefly *our own* share in that, and half of the whole. It is only now as I look back at it all that these ripe years, from the high tower, that I see the climatic separation of its changes, see the cruel old confusion of the ancient time become clarified, simplified, and dissolve and vanish away. Where is that old world now? Where is London, that wondrous city of smoke and shifting chariness, full of the deep roar and hammering mass of drivers, with its oily, shining, mud-dimmed, hump-crowded river, its black pinnacles and blackened domes, its sad wilderness of sun-grimed houses, its myriads of draperyed women, its millions of hurrying clerks? The very leaves upon its trees were foul with grime, black deformity. Where is Bremen? Full, with its green and decaying foliage, its bad, unflushing unwholesomeness, its smoky repulsive reekiness, and the myriads of workers, mostly dead, streaming over the bridges in the gray cold light of dawn? Where is New York, the high city of change and intense energy, wild sweep and competition sweep, in huge buildings jutting one another and straining ever upward for a place in the sky, the fallen picturesquely over shadowed? Where are we, lurking over roofs of heaven and costly bower, the Shamal, bladgoating, braving *the* of its all ruled *underways*, and all the grim, extravagant upholders of its *overways*, like? And where now is Philadelphia, with its immemorable small and isolated home? and Church, with its interminable, blood-stained stock yards, its polyglot underworld of human discontent?

All these last cities have gone now and gone, even to an entire pastness; and the Black Country have gone and the fires that were result, crippled, starved, and crushed under their load beneath, their for-

gotten and neglected maladjustments, and their vast, aimless, ill-conceived industrial machinery, have escaped into life. Those cities of growth and accident are altogether gone. Never a chimney smokes above our world today, and the sound of the weeping of children who toiled and hungered, the dull despot of overburdened women, the noise of brute quarrels in alleys, all charmed pleasure and all the right grace-ness of wealthy pride have gone with them, with the other change in our *East*. As I look back into the past I see a vast infinite dust of house-breaking and removed rise up into the clear air that let loose the heat of the green vapors. I live upon the Year of Tosa, the Year of Soul-folding, and like the triumph of a new theme in a piece of music the great cities of our new day arise. Come Canterbury and Amiens, the two cities of lower England, with the winding summer ray of the Thames between, and I see the grand dust of old Edinburgh due to rise again, sharp and tall beneath the shadow of her ancient hill. And Dublin too, rehopped, returning enriched, like, spacious, the city of rich laughter and warm hearts, glowing gaily in a shaft of sunlight through the cold, warm mists. I see the great cities America has planned and made; the Golden City, with ever ripening fruit along its broad warm ways, and the bell-gold City of a Thousand Spires. I see again, as I have seen, the city of theater and meeting-places, the City of the Pacific Northwest, and the new city that is still called Utah, and shadowed by an observatory dome and the plain and deepest lines of the university lapids upon the cliff, Mazarinah, the green, white, water-city of the upland suns.

And the lower places, too, the townships, the quiet racing places, villages half lost with a train of ovens down their streets, villages lined with avenues of cedar, all lines of gardens, of roses and wonderful flowers and the perpetual blossoming of trees. And through all the world go our children, our sons, the old world would have made into simple shepherds and shepman, plow-drudges and servants, our daughters who were even now matrons, prostitutes, sluts, as vice-marked mothers or rare, inspiring fathers—they passed this world glad and happy, learning, living, doing, happy and rejoicing, loose and free. I think of them wandering in the clear quiet of the rains of

Rome, among the tools of Egypt, or the temples of Athens, of their coming to Washington and its strange happiness, to Orton and the wonder of its white and shadowed trees. But who can tell of the fallen— and

plumed of life, who can number all our new cities in the world?—cities made by the living hands of men for living men, other men sleep to come, so far they are, so gracious and so kind.

BOOK THE THIRD—THE NEW WORLD

CHAPTER THE NINETEEN—LIFE AFTER THE COMET

I


O Lord I have told nothing of Nettie. I have departed widely from my individual story. I have tried to give you the effect of the change in relation to the general framework of human life, its effect of swift, magnificent drama, of an overwhelming letting in and inundation of light and the spirit of living. In my country all my life before the change has the quality of a dark passage, with the dimmest pale gleams of beauty that come and go. The rest is dull pain and darkness. Then suddenly the walls, the bitter coldness, are unloved and vanish, and I walk, blinded, perplexed, and yet rejoicing, in this sweet, beautiful world, in its fair moment beauty, its consideration, its opportunity, evolution in the glorious gift of life.

And then out of that sombre base of gloomy comes Nettie, transformed. She comes back, and Verrill is in her company. She comes back into my memory now, just as she came back then, rather suddenly at first—at first not seen very clearly, a little obscured by gregarious things, as I saw her through the slightly obscured panes of cracked glass in the window of the Mission post-office and grocer's shop. It was on the second day after the change, and I had been sending telegrams for Blenkinst, who was making arrangements for his departure to Downing Street. I saw the two of them at first as small, blurred figures. The glass made them seem curved, and it enhanced and shadowed their gestures and pace. I felt it because one to say "Please" to them, and I went up, to the jingling of the doorbell. At the sight of me they stopped short, and Verrill cried with the note of one who has caught, "Here is it!" And Nettie said, "Willie!"

I went toward them, and all the perspectives of my reconstructed universe shamed as I did so.

I seemed to see these two for the first time; how free they were, how graceful and human. It was as though I had never really looked at them before, and, indeed, always before I had beheld them through a mist of selfish passion. They had shared the universal darkness and despairing of the former time; they shared the universal exultation of the new. Now suddenly Nettie, and the love of Nettie, lived again in me. The change which had enlarged man's heart had made no end to love. Indeed, it had immensely enlarged and glorified love. She stepped into the center of that dream of world reconstruction that filled my mind, and took possession of it all.

I took her outstretched hand, and wonder overwhelmed me. "I wanted to tell you," I said simply, trying to grasp that idea. It seemed now like grasping the stars, or realising the sunlight.

"Afterwards we looked for you," said Verrill, "and we could not find you. We heard another shot."

I turned my eyes to him, and Nettie's hand fell from me. It was then I thought of how they had fallen together, and what a man must have been to have awakened in that dawn with Nettie in one's side. I had a vision of them as I had pictured them last night—the thickening figures, close together, hand in hand. The great hawks of the Change spread their darkling wings above their last vanishing paces. So they fell. And awake—lovers together in a morning of Paradise. Who can tell how bright the sunrise was to them, how hot the flavor, how sweet the singing of the birds?

They was the thoughts of my heart. But my lips were saying, "When I awoke I thought my pillow was—" Sheer blankness—let my thoughts sleep for a little while, I said myself. "I am very glad I did

not kill you—that you are here, as fair and well."

"I am going back to Clayton on the day after to-morrow," I said, breaking away to explanation. "I have been writing short-hand here for Melmont, but that is almost over now."

Neither of them said a word, and though all facts had suddenly ceased to enter anything, I went on informatively: "He is to be taken to Downing Street where there is a proper staff, so that there will be no need of me. Of course, you're a little perplexed at my being with Melmont. You see I met him—by accident—directly I recovered. I found him with a broken ankle—in that line. I am to go now to the Free Towns to help prepare a report. So that I am glad to see you both again"—I found a catch in my voice—"to say good-bye to you, and while you will."

I stopped, and we stood for a moment in silence, looking at one another.

It was I, I think, who was discovering most. I was realizing for the first time how little the Change had altered my essential nature. I had forgotten the business of love for a time in a world of wonder. That was all. Nothing was lost from my nature, nothing had gone, only the power of thought and restraint had been wonderfully increased, and new interests had been forced upon me. Nettie's personal charm for me was only quickened by the enhancement of my perceptions. In her presence, meeting her eyes, instantly my desire, no longer frantic but sane, was awake again.

I relinquished her hand. It was absurd to part in these terms. We settled we would come to the Inn at Merton and take our widow meal together.

II

While I waited for Nettie and Verrall in that agreeable meeting place, I talked to the landlady—a broad-shouldered, smiling, freckled woman—about the meaning of the Change. That robust, abundant, well-kidned figure of health was however sure that everything in the world was now to be changed for the better. That confidence, and something in her voice, made me like her as I talked to her. "Now we're made," she said, "all sorts of things will be put right that hadn't any sense in them. What? Oh! I'm sure of it."

Her blue eyes met mine in an instant of friendliness. Her lips in her pauses shaped in a pretty, faint smile.

Old tradition was strong in me; all Englishmen were then charged the most pected, and I asked what our lunch was to cost.

"Five or not," she said, "and what you like. It's ladies these days. I suppose we'll still have paying and charging, however we manage it, but it won't be the way it has been—that I feel sure. It's the part I never had any fancy for. Many a time I peeped through the bushes, trying to think what was just and right to me and mine, and what would send 'em away satisfied. It isn't the money I care for. There'll be mighty changes, be sure of that, but I'll stay, and make people happy—them that go by on the roads. It's a pleasant place here when people are merry. It's out, where they're jolting, or mazin', or tured, or sat up beyond any woman's digesting, or when they've got the drunk in 'em that Santa comes into the garden. Many's the happy face I've seen here, and many that comes again like friends, but nothing to equal what's going to be, now things are being set right."

She smiled, that buxom woman, with the joy of life and hope. "You shall have an audience," she said, "you and your friends, such an audience!—like they'll have 'em in heaven? I feel there's cooking in me these days like I've never cooked before. I'm rejoiced to have it to do."

It was just then that Nettie and Verrall appeared under a rustic archway of crimson roses that led out from the inn. Nettie was white and a bit fat, and Verrall was a figure of gray. "How are my friends," I said; but for all the range of the Change, something passed without the sunlight in my soul like the passing of the shadow of a cloud. "A pretty couple," said the landlady, as they crossed the velvet green toward me.

They were indeed a pretty couple, but that did not greatly please me. No—I sneered a little at that.

III

It is the dawn of the new time, but we have, all three of us, the marks and traces of the old. I see myself, a dark, ill-dressed youth, with the brown Lord Redcar goes



SECONDE ET DERNIÈRE ETAPPE DU VILLAGE D'ANGKOR THOM

me still blue and yellow beneath my jew, and young. Verrall sits opposite to me, better grown, better dressed, fat and quiet, two years my senior indeed, but looking no older than I, because of his light complexion, and opposite me is Nettie, with dark eyes upon my face, greener and more beautiful than I had ever seen her in the former time. Her dress is still that white one she had worn when I came upon her in the park, and still about her dainty neck she wears her string of pearls and that little chain of gold. She is no much the same, she is so changed, a girl then, and now a woman—and all my agency and all the marvel of the Change between! Over the end of the green table about which we sit, a spotless cloth is spread. It bears a pleasant lunch spread out with a simple etiquette. Behind me is the liberal spacious of the green and various gardens. I see it all. I sit again there eating awkwardly, and Verrall talks of the Change.

"You can't imagine," he says in his sure, fine accents, "how the Change has destroyed me. I still don't feel awake. Men of my sort are so tremendously weak; I never suspected it before."

He leans over the table toward me with an evident desire to make himself perfectly understood. "I find myself like some creature that is taken out of its shell—soft and new. I was trained to dress in a certain way, to behave in a certain way, to think in a certain way. I see now it's all wrong and narrow—most of it anyhow—a system of class subordination. We were meant to each other in order to be a going to the rest of the world. Gentlemen indeed! But it's perplexing—"

I can hear him once saying that now, and see the lift of his eyebrows and his pleasant smile.

He paused. He had wanted to say that, but it was not the thing we had to say.

I leaned forward a little and took hold of my glass very tightly. "You two," I said, "will marry?"

They looked at each other.

Nettie spoke very softly. "I did not mean to marry when I came away," she said.

"I know," I answered. I hauled up with a sense of effort and met Verrall's eyes.

He answered me. "I think we have joined our lives. But the thing that took us was a sort of madness."

I nodded. "All passion," I said, "—

madness." Then I fell into a dozing of those words.

"Why did we do these things?" he said, turning to her suddenly.

Her hands were clasped under her chin, her eyes downcast.

"We had to," she said, with her old trick of hidequaint expression.

Then she seemed to open out suddenly.

"Willie," she cried with a sudden distress, with her eyes appealing to me. "I didn't mean to treat you badly—I told I didn't. I kept thinking of you—and of father and mother, all the time. Only it didn't seem to move me. It didn't move me one bit from the way I had chosen."

"Chosen?" I said.

"Something seemed to have hold of me," she admitted. "It's all so unaccountable." She gave a little gesture of despair.

Verrall's fingers played on the cloth for a space. Then he turned his face to me again.

"Something—everything—and, 'Take her.' It was a raging desire—for her. Everything contributed to that—or seemed for nothing. You——"

"Go on," said I.

"What I know of you——"

I looked at Nettie. "You never told him about me," I said, feeling, as it were, a string out of the old time.

Verrall answered for her. "No. But things dropped. I saw you that night, my instincts were all awake. I knew it was you."

"Go on," I said.

"Everything compelled to make it the finest thing in life. It had an air of generous recklessness. It wasn't recklessness, I might soon believe in that life of politics and affairs, for which I was trained, which it was my honor to follow. That made it all the finer. It meant ruin at any rate for Nettie. That made it all the finer. No man or decent man would have approved of what we did. That made it more splendid than ever. I had all the advantages of position and used them freely. That mattered not at all."

"Yes," I said, "it is true. And the same dark wave that lifted you, swept me on to follow with that recklessness—and blathering with him. And the word to you, Nettie, what was it? 'Give?' 'I had you all down the steps!'"

Nettie's hands fell upon the table. "I can't tell what it was," she said, speaking

here-bent straight to me. "Girls aren't treated as men are to look into their minds. I can't see it yet. All sorts of mean little motives were there—over and above the 'mean.' I kept thinking of his clothes—the uniform, a flash of brightness, at Verrall. "I kept thinking of being like a lady and sitting in a hotel—with men like butlers waiting. It's the dreadful truth, Wilke. Things are mean as that! Things meaner than that!"

"It wasn't all mean," I said slowly, after a pause.

"No!" They spoke together.

"Not a woman chooses more than a man does," Nettie added. "I saw it all in little bright pictures. Do you know—that jacket—there's something—You won't mind my telling you?"

I nodded. "No."

She spoke as if she spoke to my soul, very quietly and very earnestly, seeking to give the truth. "Something comes in that cloth of yours," she said. "I know there's something horrible in being young raised by things like that, but they did wrong me round. In the old time—to have confessed that! And I hated Clayton—and the grace of it. That kitchen! Your mother's dreadful kitchen! And besides, Wilke, I was afraid of you. I didn't understand you and I did him. It's different now—but then I knew what he meant. And there was his voice."

"Yes," I said to Verrall, making these discoveries quietly, "yes, Verrall, you have a good voice. Queer I never thought of that before!"

We sat silently for a time before our vivisected passions.

"God!" I cried, "and there was an poor little toy-humper of indifference on all these waves of anguish and needless desire, these floating things of touch and sight and feeling, like this—a coop of hawks—watched overclouded and chacking amidst the sea."

Verrall laughed approval of the image I had struck out. "A week ago," he said, trying it further, "we were clinging to our clothes-rooms and going with the house and poor. That was good enough a week ago—but to-day—"

"To-day," I said, "the word has fallen. The world-storm is over. And each chicken coop has changed by a miracle to a vessel that makes head against the sea!"

IV

"What are we to do?" asked Verrall.

Nettie drew a despatched curtain from the bowl before us, and began very neatly and deliberately to turn down the sepals of its calyx and remove, one by one, its petals. I remember that went on through all our talk. She put these rugged crimson staves in a long row and adjusted them and readjusted them. When at last I was alone with these vestiges the pattern was still incomplete.

"Well," said I, "the matter seems fairly simple. You two—I swallowed it—love each other."

I paused. They answered me by silence, by a thoughtful silence.

"You belong to each other. I have thought it over and looked on it from many points of view. I happened to want—impossible things. I behaved badly. I had no right to pursue you." I turned to Verrall. "You hold yourself bound to her?"

He nodded assent.

"No social influence, no fading out of all that generous closeness in the air—for that might happen—will change you back."

He answered me with honest eyes meeting mine. "No, landlord, no!"

"I did not know you," I said, "I thought of you as something very different from this."

"I was," he interpolated.

"Now," I said, "it is all changed."

Then I halted, for my thread had slipped away from me.

"As for me," I went on, and glanced at Nettie's downcast face, and then sat forward with my eyes upon the flowers between us, "since I am satisfied and shall be repaid by an affection for Nettie, since that affection is rich with the seeds of desire, since to see her years and wizened years is not to be endured by me—I must turn about and go from you; you must avoid me and I you. We must divide the world like Jacob and Esau. I must direct myself with all the will I have to other things. After all this position is not like! It is perhaps for hours and hours, but for years and years. We must part and I must forget. What else is there but that?"

I did not look up, I sat very tense with the red petals pressing an unfeeling memory to my brain, but I felt the accent of Verrall's voice. There were some moments of silence.

Then Nettie spoke. "But——" she said, and ceased.

I waited for a little while. I sighed and leaned back in my chair. "It is perfectly simple," I replied, "now that we have cool heads."

"But is it simple?" asked Nettie, and dashed my discourse out of being.

I looked up and fixed her with her eyes on Verrall. "You see," she said, "I like Willie. It's hard to say what one feels, but I don't want him to go away like that."

"But then," objected Verrall, "how——"

"No," said Nettie, and swept her half-severed carnation petals back into a heap of confusion. She began to arrange them very quickly into one long straight line.

"It's so difficult. For never before in all my life tried to get to the bottom of my mind. For one thing, I've not treated Willie properly. He—he counted on me. I know he did. I was his hope. I was a promised delight, something, something to crown life—better than anything he had ever had, had a secret pride. He lived upon me. I know—when we two began to meet together, you and I—it was a sort of treachery to him——"

"Treachery?" I said. "You were only leading your way through all these perplexities."

"You thought it treachery."

"I don't now."

"I did. In a sense I think so still. For you had need of me."

I made a slight protest at this doctrine and fell silent.

"And even when he was trying to kill us," she said to her lover, "I left him down in the bottom of my mind. I can understand all the terrible things, the humiliations—the humiliations he went through."

"Yes," I said, "but I don't see——"

"I don't see. I'm only trying to see. But you know, Willie, you are a part of my life. I have known you longer than I have known Edward. I know you better. Indeed I know you with all my heart. You think all your talk was thrown away upon me, that I never understood that side of you, or your ambitions or anything. I did—more than I thought at the time. Now—now it is all clear to me. What I had to understand is you were something deeper than Edward taught me. I have a now. You are a part of my life, and I don't want

to cut all that off from me now I have comprehended it, and throw it away."

"But you love Verrall."

"Love is such a queer thing! Is there one love? I mean, only one love?" She turned to Verrall. "I know I love you. I can speak out about that now, before the morning; I couldn't have done so. It's just as though my soul had got out of a sealed glass. But what is it, this love for you? It's a mass of factors—things about you—ways you look, ways you have. It's the same—the sense of certain beauties. It's flattery too—things you said, hopes and desires for myself. And all that had rolled up together and taken to itself the wild help of these deep emotions that shambled in my body; it covered everything. But it wasn't. How can I describe it! It was like having a very bright lamp with a thick shade, everything else in the room was hidden. But you take the shade off and there they are—it is the same light—all there! Only it lights everyone!"

The voice ceased. For a while no one spoke, and Nettie, with a quick movement, swept the petals into the shape of a pyramid.

Figures of speech always distract me, and it ran through my mind like some passing relays. "It is still the same light."

"No woman believes these things," she asserted abruptly.

"What things?"

"No woman ever has believed them."

"You have to choose a man," said Verrall, apprehending her before I did.

"We've brought up to that. We've told— it's in books, in stories, in the way people look, in the way they behave—see they there will come a man. He will be everything, no one else will be anything. Leave everything else, live to him."

"And a man, too, is taught that of some women," said Verrall.

"Only men don't believe it; they have more chaste minds. Men have never believed, as though they believed it. One need not be old to know that. By nature they don't believe it. But a woman believes nothing by nature; she goes into a world hiding her secret thoughts absent from herself."

"She used to," I said.

"You haven't," said Verrall, "anyhow."

"I've come out. It's the same—and Willie. And because I never really believed in the mind at all—even if I thought I did.

It's stupid to send Wilkes off—shamed, cast out, never to see him again—when I like him as much as I do. It is cruel, it is wicked and ugly, to praise over him as if he was a defeated enemy, and pretend I'm going to be happy just the same. There's no sense in a rule of life that prescribes that. It's foolish, it's foolish, it's like something that has no sense. I——" There was a sob in her voice. "Wilkes! I won't."

I sat hunched, resting with my eyes upon her quick fingers.

"It's foolish," I said at last, with a careful unemotional deliberation. "Nevertheless—it is in the nature of things. Not You see, after all, we are still half beasts, Nettie. And men, as you say, are more obstinate than women. The comet hasn't altered that; it's only made it clearer. We have come this long through a tumult of blind forces. I come back to what I said just now: we have freed our poor reasonable minds, our wills to live well, ourselves, adult on a mass of instincts, passions, instinctive prejudices, half-suspected superstitions: we are like people clinging to something—like people clinging upon a raft."

"We come back at last to my question," said Vernell softly. "What are we to do?"

"Part," I said. "You see, Nettie, these bodies of ours are not the bodies of angels. I have read somewhere that in our bodies you can find evidences of the lowest savagery; that about our larynx—our larynx—about our teeth, there remains still something of the fish, that there are bones that recall little—what is it?—anemophilous fishbones—and a hundred traces of the ape. Even your beautiful body, Nettie, carries this trait. No, hear me out." I leaned forward earnestly. "Our emotions, our passions, our desires, the substance of them, like the substance of our bodies, is an animal, a competing, thing, as well as a departing thing. You speak to me now, a mind to mind. One can do that when one has had contact and when one has contact, when one is not doing anything, but when one turns to love, one turns again to matter."

"Yes," said Nettie, steadily following me, "but you control it."

"Only through a measure of obedience. There is no magic in the business, to conquer matter, we must divide the enemy, and make matter as an ally. Nowadays it is indeed true that by faith a man can remove mountains. He can say to a mountain,

"Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea"; but he does it because he helps and trusts his brother men, because he has the wit and patience and courage to win over to his side men, steel, obedience, dynamite, stones, trucks, the money of other people. To conquer my desire for you, I must not perpetually threat it by your presence; I must go away so that I may not see you, I must take up other interests, threat myself into struggles and discussions——"

"And forget?" said Nettie.

"Not forget," I said, "but anyhow—turn to breed upon you."

She hung on that for some moments.

"No," she said, demolished her last pretensions and looked up at Vernell as he started.

Vernell leaned forward on the table, elbows upon it, and the fingers of his two hands intertwined.

"You know," he said, "I haven't thought much of these things. At school and the university, one doesn't. It was part of the system to prevent it. They'll alter all that no doubt. We used to be dithering about over questions that one came to at last in Greek—with various readings—in Plato, but which it never occurred to anyone to translate out of a dead language into living realities." He halted and started some unspoken question from his own mind with, "No. I think with Lessing, Nettie, that, as he put it, it is in the nature of things for man to be obstinate. Men are few things and go about the world, but only one man can possess a woman. The most dramatic result. We are made for the struggle for existence—we are the struggle for existence; the things that live are the struggle for existence incarnate—and that works out that the man struggle for their wives; for such women one prevails. The others gravity."

"Like animals," said Nettie.

"Yes."

"There are many things in life," I said, "but that is the rough material truth."

"But," said Nettie, "you don't struggle. That has been altered because men have minds."

"You choose," I said.

"If I don't choose to choose?"

"You have chosen."

She gave a little impulsive "Oh! Why are women always the slaves of men? I think this age of Reason and Light that has come to alter nothing of that? And moreover? I think it is all—shaped. I do not be

Here this is the right solution of the thing, or anything but the bad habits of the time that was. *festivals!* You don't let your whims rule you in a lot of other things. Here am I between you. Here is Edward. I—love him because he is gay and pleasure, and because—because I like him! Here is Willie—a part of me—my first secret, my oldest friend! Why may I not have both? Am I not a man that you must think of me as nothing but a woman—except me always as a thing to struggle for?" She paused, then she made her distressful proposition to me. "Let us three keep together," she said. "Let us not part. To part is hate, Willie. Why should we not always keep friends and meet and talk?"

"Talk?" I said. "About this sort of thing?"

I looked across at Vernon and saw his eyes, and we studied each other. It was the clear, straight scrutiny of honest antagonism. "No," I decided, "between us nothing of that sort can be."

"Ever?" said Nettie.

"Never," I said, concurred.

I made an effort within myself. "We cannot tamper with the law and custom of these things," I said; "these passions are too close to man's essential self. Better surgery than a flagrant disease! From Nettie my love will die. A man's love is not devotion, it is a demand, a challenge. And besides?—and here I forced my theme—" I have given myself now to a new mistress, and it is I, Nettie, who am unfaithful. Behind you and above you rises the coming City of the World, and I am in that building. Dear heart! you are only happiness—and that—that girls? If it is only that my Nettie shall choose the foundation stones—I could almost hope that should be my part, Nettie—I will jolt myself on that." I threw all the conviction I could into those words. "No conflict of passions," I added a little laconically, "except distract me."

There was a pause.

"Then we must part," said Nettie, with the eyes of a woman one strike in the face.

I nodded assent.

There was a little pause, and then we all stood up. We parted almost silently, with no more meaningful words, and I was left presently in the arbor alone.

I do not think I watched them go. I only remember myself left there somehow—but

ridly empty and alone. I sat down again and fell into a sleep, shapeless muting.

V

Suddenly I looked up. Nettie had come back and stood looking down at me.

"Since we talked I have been thinking," she said. "Edward has let me come to you alone. And I feel perhaps I can talk better to you alone."

I said nothing and that embarrassed her.

"I don't think we ought to part," she said. "No—I don't think we ought to part," she repeated. "Our lives in different ways. I wonder if you will understand what I am saying, Willie. It is hard to say what I feel, but I want it said. If we are to part forever I want it said—very plainly. Always before I have had the woman's respect and the woman's training which makes one hide. But—Edward is not all of me. Think of what I am saying—Edward is not all of me. I wish I could tell you better how I say it. I am not all of myself. You, at any rate, are a part of me and I cannot bear to leave you. And I cannot see why I should leave you. There is a sort of blood link between us, Willie. We grew together. We are in each other's bones. I understand you. Now indeed I understand. In some way I have come to an understanding at a stride. I understand you and your dream. I want to help you. Edward—Edward has no disease. It is dreadful to me, Willie, to think we two are to part."

"But we have settled that—part we must."

"How today?"

"I'll—see you."

"Well—why should I hide it, Willie?—I love you." Our eyes met. She flushed, she went on impulsively. "You are stupid. The whole thing is staged. I love you both."

I said, "You do not understand what you say."

"You mean that I must go?"

"Yes, yes. Get!"

For a moment we looked at each other, mute, as though deep down in the undiscriminable depths below the surface and present reality of things dumb meanings strove to be. She made to speak and desisted.

"But over I go?" she said at last, with quivering lips, and the tears in her eyes were clear. Then she began, "Willie—"

"Go!" I interrupted her. "Yes?"

Then again we were still.

She stood there, a beautiful figure of pity, loosing for me, praying me. Something of that wider love that will carry our descendants at last out of all the limits, the hard, clear obligations of our personal life, moved me, like the first breath of a coming wind out of heaven that fills and passes away. I had an impulse to take her hand and kiss it, and then a terrible name to me, and I knew that if I touched her my strength would all pass from me.

And so, standing at a distance one from the other, we parted, and Nettie went, reluctant and looking back, with the men she had chosen to the lot she had chosen, out of my life—like the sunlight, out of my life.

VI

I remember all that very distinctly to this day. I could almost wrench the words I have just into my several mouth. Then comes a blank. I have a dim memory of being back in the house near the Links and the castle of Melmoorant's departure, of Reding Park's energy disturbed, and of going away down the road with a strong desire to say good-bye to Melmoorant alone.

Perhaps I was already doubting my chances to part forever from Nettie, for I think I had it in mind to tell her all that had been said and done.

I don't think I had a word with her or anything but a hurried hand-clasp. I am not sure it has gone out of my mind. But I have a very clear and certain memory of my phase of blank desolation as I watched his car retires and shrub and search over Mapledborough Hill, and that I get there my first full and definite intuition that, after all, this great Change and my new wide aims in life were not to mean indifference and happiness for me. I had a sense of protest, as against extreme unfairness, as I saw him go. "It is too soon," I said to myself, "to leave me alone."

I felt I had sacrificed too much, that after I had said good-bye to the hot immediate life of passion, to Nettie and desire, to physical and personal rivalry, to all that was most intensely myself, it was wrong to leave me alone and care-burdened, to go on at once with those frosty cold duties of the wider life. I felt newborn, and naked, and at a loss.

"Work!" I said with an effort at the house, and turned about with a sigh, and was glad that the way I had to go would at least take me to my mother.

But, curiously enough, I remember myself as being fairly cheered in the train of Birmingham that night, and I recall an active and interested mood. I spent the night in Birmingham because the train service was discontinued, and I could not get on. I went to dinner in a hotel that was playing its heavy old-world music in the public park, and I fell into conversation with a man who said he had been a reporter upon one of the minor local papers. He was full and keen upon all the plans of reconstruction that were now shaping over the lives of humanity, and I know that something of that noble dream came back to me with his words and phrases. We walked up to a place called Barnetts by moonlight, and talked of the new social groupings that must replace the old solidified homes, and how the people would be housed.

The Barnetts was preposterous to that matter. It had been an attempt on the part of a private firm of manufacturers to improve the housing of their workers. To our minds to-day it would seem the feeblest of forefathers' efforts, but at the time it was extraordinary and famous, and people came long journeys to see its tree cottages with bats and nests under the kitchen floors (at all conceivable places), and other brilliant inventions. No one in that aggressive age seemed to see the danger in liberty that might arise through making working people tenants and drivers of their employer, through an act called the truck act had long ago intervened to prevent master developments in the same direction. But I and my chance acquaintances that night seemed always to have been aware of that possibility, and we had no doubt in our minds of the general nature of the housing duty.

It was very interesting, but still a little dreary, and when I lay in bed that night I thought of Nettie and the queer modifications of preference she had made, and among other things, and in a way, I prayed. I prayed that night to a Master Artisan, the unseen captain of all who go about the building of the world, the making of mankind. But before and after I prayed I lay propped I was talking and reasoning and meditating upon with Nettie. But she never came into the temple of that worshiping with me.

(To be continued.)

In the Days of the Comet

BY H. G. WELLS

Illustrated by H. G. Wells

BOOK THE THIRD—THE NEW WORLD

CHAPTER THE SECOND—MY MOTHER'S LAST DAYS

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YESTERDAY. The previous instalment died with happiness in England just before the Great Change, when a huge comet is threatening to ram its course with the earth. In addition to hard times and general discontent with existing social conditions, England has gone to war with Germany. The master, William Tavelton, has become a invalid through the influence of his friend, Pastel. This move leads to the breaking of Lordholt's engagement to Nedra Sweet. The young man and his love have split, and when she sleeps with Robert Tavelton the son of her father's employer, he follows the couple to a prison on the boat train. Here he manages to kill the master with his revolver. But the master is still, and just that the earth, moving into the comet's path, is engulfed in a gas which encircles every living being unceasingly. The train has a few hours. Humanity then wakes to a changed world. Men find that they have new men, new machines, new ideas. They begin to reconstruct the world in a fashion dictated by the principles of human brotherhood. Tavelton sees that he must give Nedra up to Pastel, and does so.

I



YESTERDAY I came home to Clayton.

The new strange brightness of the world was all the brighter there for the host of dark dreary moments of darkened childhood, halcyon youth, embittered adolescence, that were about the place for me. It seemed to me that I was meeting them for the first time. No chimneys smoked that day, no furnaces were burning. The people were busy with other things. The clear strong sun, the sparkle in the dazzling air, made a strange gayety at the station streets. I passed a number of working people coming home from the public breakfast that were given in the town hall until better things could be arranged, and happened on Pastel among them. "You were right about that comet," I sang out at the sight of him, and he came toward me and clasped my hand.

"What are people doing here?" said I.

"They're coming in, food from outside," he said, "and we're going to level all these shacks—and shift into towns on the morrow", and he began to tell me of many things that were being arranged, the Midland land

communities had got to work with remarkable energy and directness of purpose, and the rechristening of population was already planned in its broad outlines. He was working at an improved college of engineering. Until schemes of work were made out, almost everyone was going to school again to get as much technical training as possible amidst the demands of the huge enterprise of reconstruction that was now beginning.

He walked with me to my door, and there I met old Pettigrew coming down the steps. He looked dusty and tired, but his eye was brighter than it used to be, and he carried in a rather associations manner a workman's tool box.

"How's the rheumatism, Mr. Pettigrew?" I asked.

"Dit," said old Pettigrew, "less work worsens." He looked me in the eye. "These houses," he said, "will have to come down, I suppose, and our assessors of property must undergo very considerable revision in the light of results, but meanwhile I've been doing something to patch that diagonal roof of mine. To think that I could have dodged and evaded!"

He raised a degenerately hand, drew down the loose corners of his ample mouth, and shook his old head.

"The past is past, Mr. Pettigrew."

"Your poor dear mother! So good and

honest a woman! So simple and kind and forgiving! To think of it! My dear young man"—he said it merrily—"I've abandoned!"

"The whole world blushed at down the other day, Mr. Pittigree," I said, "and did it very partially. That's over now, God knows. Who is not ashamed of all that came before last Tuesday?"

I held out a forgiveing hand, nately informed that in this place I was a thief, and he took it and went his way, shaking his hand and repeating he was ashamed, but I think a little comforted.

The door opened and my poor old mother's face, marvelously cleaned, appeared. "Ah, Willa, boy! You! You!"

I ran up the steps to her, for I feared she might fail.

How she clung to me in the passage, the dear woman! But first she shut the front door. The old habit of respect for me unaccountable temper still vexed her. "Ah, dear!" she said, "oh, dear! But you were very tried," and kept her face close to my shoulder, lest she should offend me by the sight of the scars that were in her eyes.

She made a sort of gulping noise and vanished for a while, holding me very tightly to her heart with her worn, long hands.

She thanked me presently for my telegram, and I put my arms about her and drew her into the living room.

"It's all well with me, mother dear," I said, "and the dark times are over—over, close with forever, mother."

Whereupon she had orange and grape juice and nodded about, more shadowing her. She had not let me know she could still work for two gray years.

II

Dear heart! there remained for her but a very brief while in this world that had been reserved. I did not know how short that time would be, but the little I could determine, after all it was not likely to last—to alone for the hardness of my days of work and rebellion, I did. I took care to be constantly with her, for I perceived now her unusual need of me. It was not that we had others to exchange or pleasures to share, but she liked to see me at work, to watch me working, to have me go to and fro. There was no tell for her any more in the world, but only such light services as are easy and

pleasant for a worn and weary old woman to do, and I think she was happy even at her end.

She kept to her queer old eighteenth-century version of religion, too, without a change. She had seen this particular umbrella so long it was a part of her. Yet the Change was evident even in that persistence. I said to her one day, "But do you still believe in that half of them, dear mother? You—with your tender heart?"

No need she did. Some theological intimacy made it necessary to her, but still—

She looked thoughtfully at a book of proverbs before her for a time, and then laid her tremulous hand unceasingly on my arm. "You know, Willa dear," she said, as though she was clearing up a childish misunderstanding of mine, "I don't think anyone will go there. I never did think that."

III

That talk stands out in my memory because of that agreeable theological diversion all here, but it was only one of a great number of talk. It used to be pleasant in the evenings, after the day's work was done and before one went on with the evening's study—how odd it would have seemed in the old days for a young man of the intellectual class to be doing post-graduate work in sociology, and how much a matter of course it seems now!—to walk out into the gardens of Lowchester House, and smoke a cigarette or so and let her talk musingly of the things that interested her. Physically the Great Change did not do so very much to invigorate her—she had lived in that dismal underground kitchen in Clayton too long for any natural rejuvination. She glowed out indeed as a dying spark among the ashes might glow under a draught of fresh air—and earnestly it hastened her end. But these closing days were very tranquil, full of an effortless contentment. With her, life was like a rainy, weedy day that clears only to show the sunset afterglow—the light has passed. She acquired no new habits, amid the comforts of the new life, did no new things, but only found a brighter light upon the old.

She lived with a number of other old ladies belonging to our company in the upper rooms of Lowchester House. These upper apartments were simple and ample, fair and well done in the Georgian style,

and they had been organised to give the maximum of comfort and convenience and to economise the need of skilled attendance. We had taken over the various "great houses," as they used to be called, in order to make continual dining-rooms; these houses were conveniently large—and pleasant places for the old people of every age whose time of rest had come, and the similar public uses. We had done this not only with Lord Redcar's house, but also with Chelmsford House—where old Mrs. Varnell made a dignified and capable hostess—and indeed with most of the big residences in the beautiful vale country between the Four Towns district and the Welsh mountains. About these great houses there had usually been good out-buildings, laundry, married-servants' quarters, stabling, drives, and the like, suitably masked by trees. We turned these into homes, and to them we added fine terraces and wood chalets and afterwards quadrangular residential buildings. In order to be near my mother I had two small rooms in the new collegiate buildings which our committee was almost the first to possess, and they were very convenient for the station of the high-speed electric railway that took me down to our daily conference and my secretarial and statistical work in Clayton.

Ours had been one of the first modern committees to get in order, we were greatly helped by the energy of Lord Redcar, who had a fine feeling for the permanent associations of his ancestral home—the drove that took our line through the heathes and fens and bluffs of the West Wood and saved the pleasant open wildness of the park was one of his suggestions—and we had many reasons to be proud of our surroundings. Nearly all the other committees that sprang up all over the pleasant parkland round the industrial valley of the Four Towns, as the workers moved out, came to us to study the architecture of the residential squares and quadrangles with which we had replaced the back streets between the great houses and the ecclesiastical residences about the cathedral, and the way in which we had adapted all these buildings to our new social needs. Some claimed to have improved on us. But they could not emulate the rhododendron garden out beyond our shrubberies, that was a thing altogether out out in our part of England, because of its expense and of the rarity of good pent free from lice.

These gardens had been planned under the third Lord Redcar, fifty years ago and more; they abounded in rhododendrons and azaleas, and were in places so well sheltered and sunny that great magnolias flourished and flowered. There were tall trees with red and crimson and yellow climbing roses, and an endless variety of flowering shrubs and fine lawns, and such purple grass as no other garden could show. And barred by the broad shadows of these, were glades and broad spaces of emerald turf, and here and there banks of peacock roses and flower beds, and banks given over, some to spring bulbs, and some to primroses and primulas and polyanthus. My mother loved these latter banks and the blue road, staring eyes of their incomparable yellow, reddish-brown, and purple corollas, more than anything else the garden could show, and in the spring of the Year of Scrafolding she would go with me day after day to the sun that showed them in the greatest multitude.

It goes far, I think, among other agreeable impressions, a sense of personal opulence. In the old time she had never known what it was to have more than enough of anything applicable to the world at all.

We would sit and think, or talk—there was a curious effect of complete understanding between us, whether we talked or were still.

"Heaven," she said to me one day, "isn't it a paradise?"

I was moved to tease her a little. "There's jewels, you know, walls and gates of jewels—and singing."

"For such as like them," said my mother briefly, and thought for a while. "There'll be things for all of us, of course. But for me it couldn't be heaven, dear, unless it was a garden—a nice sunny garden. And feeling such as we're fond of are close and handy by."

You of your happier generation cannot realize the wonderfulness of those early days in the new epoch, the sense of security, the extraordinary effects of content. In the morning, except on high summer, I was up before dawn, and breakfasted upon the soft, smooth train, and perhaps saw the sunrise as I rolled out of the little tunnel that pierced Clayton Creek, and so to work like a man. Now that we had got all the houses and schools and all the sources of life away from our coal and iron ore and clay, are not that a thousand obstructive "rights?"

and facilities had been swept aside, we could let ourselves go. So we merged this enterprise with that, cut across this or that anciently attractive piece of private land, joined and separated, effected gigantic combinations and gigantic economies, and the valley, no longer a pit of squalid human tragedies and misery-curtailing industries, grew into a sort of beauty of its own, a savage, turbulent beauty of forces and machinery and flames. One was a Titan in that Brazen. Then back one came at midday to hark and change in the trees, and so to the last, lonely, gaudily gaudy lunch in the club dining-room at *Locomotiv House*, and the refreshment of these green and quiet afternoons tranquillities.

Sometimes in her profounder moments my mother doubted whether all this last phase of her life was not a dream.

"A dream," I used to say, "a dream indeed—but a dream that is one step nearer awakening than that nightmare of the former days."

She found great comfort and assurance in my altered clothes—she liked the new habitation of dress, she alleged. It was not simply altered clothes. I did grow two inches, broaden some inches round my chest, and increase in weight three scores before I was twenty-three. I wore a well-known dress and she would cover me, sleeve and admiring, it greatly—she had the woman's sense of texture very strong in her.

Sometimes she would muse upon the past, rubbing together her poor rough hands—they never got soiled. She told me much I had not heard before about my father, and her own early life. It was like finding flat and faded flowers in a book, still faintly sweet, to realize that once my mother had been loved with passion, that my remote father had once shed hot tears of tenderness in her arms. And she would sometimes even speak pensively of Nettie, in those narrow, old-world phrases that her lips might rob of all their bitter earnestness.

"She wasn't worthy of you, dear," she would say abruptly, forcing me to guess the person she intended.

"No man is worthy of a woman's love," I answered. "No woman is worthy of a man's." I loved her, dear mother, and that you cannot alter."

"There's others," she would assure.

"Not for me," I said. "Not! I didn't fire a shot that time, I trusted my magazine. I

can't begin again, mother, not from the beginning!"

She sighed and said no more then.

At another time she said—I think her words were: "You'll be lonely when I go, dear."

"You'll not think of going, then," I said.

"Eh, dear! but man and maid should come together!"

I said nothing to that.

"You breed overmuch on Nettie, dear. If I could see you married to some decent girl of a woman, some good, kind girl—!"

"Dear mother, I'm married enough. Perhaps some day—! Who knows? I can wait."

"But to have nothing to do with a son!"

"I have my friends. Don't you worry, mother. There's plentiful work for a man in the world though the heart of love is cast out from him. Nettie was life and beauty for me—it will be. Don't think I've lost too much, mother."

(Because in my heart I told myself the end had still to come.)

And once she sprung a question on me suddenly that surprised me.

"Where are they now?" she asked.

"Oh, here."

"Nettie and—Mrs."

She had passed to the memory of my thoughts. "I don't know," I said shortly.

Her shrivelled hand just flattened into touch of me.

"It's better so," she said, as if pleading, "indeed it is better so." There was something in her quivering old voice that for a moment took me back across an epoch to the protests of the former time, to those counsels of subduance, those appeals to offend it, that had always stirred an angry spirit of rebellion within me.

"That is the thing I dread," I said, and though I felt I could talk no more to her of Nettie. I got up and walked away from her, and came back after a while, to speak of other things, with a bunch of daffodils for her in my hand.

But I did not always spend my afternoons with her. There were days when my crushed hunger for Nettie rose again, and then I had to be alone; I walked, or bicycled, and presently I found a new interest and relief in learning to ride. For the horse was already very naffle reaping the benefits of the Change. Hardly anywhere was the instrument of horse traction to be

found after the first year of the new epoch, everywhere lagging and dragging and straining were done by machines, and the horse had become a beautiful instrument for the pleasure and carriage of youth. I rode both in the middle and, what is finer, naked and barebacked. I found violent exercises were good for the state of enormous melancholy that came upon me, and when at last home riding palled, I went and joined the austerities who practiced soaring upon strophanes beyond Hammarskjöld Hill. But at least every alternate day I spent with my mother, and altogether I think I gave her two-thirds of my attention.

TW

When presently that illness, that fading weakness that made a euthanasia for so many of the older people in the beginning of the new time, took hold upon my mother, there came Anna Rönn to comfort her—after our new custom. She chose to come. She was already known to us a little from chance meetings and chance services she had done my mother in the garden. She seemed then just one of those plucky good girls the world at its worst has never failed to produce, who were in the dark old times the hidden antiseptic of all our hating, hating, huddled lives. They made their secret voiceless worship, they did their silent, unexpired, unbroken, unselfish work as helpful daughters, as nurses, as faithful servants, in the horrible provinces of houses. She was almost exactly three years older than I. At first I found no beauty in her; she was short, but rather sturdy and ruddy, with red fringed hair, and fair hairy brows and red-brown eyes. But her bejaded hands I found were full of help, her voice carried good clear.

At first she was no more than a blue-clad, white-sponged housewife that moved in the shadows behind the bed on which my old mother lay and sank restfully to death. She would come forward to anticipate some little need, to gather some simple comestibles, and always then my mother smiled on her. In a little while I discovered the beauty of that helpful grace of her woman's body, I discovered the grace of soaring, goodness, the sweetness of a tender pity, and the great richness of her voice, of her few resonating words and phrases. I noted and remembered very clearly how once my mother's

lips old hand patted the fine gold-twisted strength of hair, as it went by upon its cushion with the coverlet.

"She is a good girl to me," said my mother one day—"a good girl. Like a daughter should be. I never had a daughter—really." She ceased pensively for a space. "Your little sister died," she said.

I had never heard of that little sister.

"Remember the teeth," said my mother. "Twenty-nine months and three days. I cried—cried. That was before you came, dear. So long ago—and I can see it now. I was a young wife then, and your father was very bad. But I can see his hands, in dear little quiet hands. Dear, they say that now—now they will not let the little children die."

"No, dear mother," I said, "we shall do better now."

"The club doctor could not come. Your father went twice. There was some one else, someone who paid. So your father went on into Stockholm, and that man wouldn't come unless he had his fee. And your father had changed his clothes to look more respectful and he hadn't any money, not even his train fare home. It seemed cruel to be treating them with my baby thing in pain. And I can't help thinking perhaps we might have saved her. But it was like that with the poor things in the bad old times—always. When the doctor came at last he was angry. 'Why wasn't I called before?' he said, and he took no pains. He was angry because some one hadn't explained I beyond him—but it was too late."

She said these things very quietly, with drooping eyelids, like one who describes a dream. "We're going to manage all these things better now," I said, feeling a strange reassurance at the pedial talk story her faded, mother-of-fact voice was telling me.

"She talked," my mother went on—"she talked for her age wonderfully. Hippopotamus."

"Hh?" I said.

"Hippopotamus, dear—quite plainly one day, when her father was showing her pictures. And her little prayer. 'Now I lay me down to sleep.' I made her little socks. Knitted they were, dear, and the heel most difficult."

Her eyes were closed now. She spoke no longer to me, but to herself. She whispered other vague things, little sentences, glibly



SEE WHITELAW WITH ME DAY AFTER DAY TO THE SHIP THAT SHOWED THE FLOWERS
IN THE GREATEST MULTITUDE

of long dead moments. Her words grew less distinct.

Presently she was asleep and I got up and went out of the room, but my mind was querulously disposed by the thought of that little life that had been glad and hopeful only to pass so inexplicably out of hope again into torpority, the sister of whom I had never heard before.

And presently I was in a black rage at all the irrecoverable sorrows of the past, of that great ocean of avoidable suffering of which this was but one luminous and quivering red drop. I walked in the garden and the garden was too small for me. I went out to wander in the rooms. "The past is past," I cried, and all the while across the grill of fire and twenty years I could hear my poor mother's heart wrung weeping for that hapless daughter who had suffered and died. Indeed that old spirit of rebellion has not altogether died in me, for all the transfer-

mation of the new time. I quieted down at last to a thin and austere comfort in thinking that the whole is not told to us, that a man—not perhaps he told to such ends as ours, and what was her more comforting, that now we have strength and courage and the new gift of "new loss, whatever cruel and sad things marred the past, none of these sorrowful things that made the way warp and woof of the old life, need now go on happening. "We could forever, we could prevent and save." "The past is past," I said, between sighing and weeping, as I came late very again on my homeward way of the hundred sunset-lit windows of old Longchaster House. "These sorrows are sorrows no more."

But I could not altogether cheat that common sadness of the new time, that memory and insatiable rifle of the countless lives that had stumbled and failed in pain and darkness before our air gave clear

CHAPTER VIII: VICTORY—FIFTY-FIVE AND NEW YEARS EVE

E

In the end my mother died rather suddenly, and her death came as a shock to me. Diagnosis was still very inadequate at that time. The doctors were, of course, fully alive to the incredible defects of their common training and were doing all they could to supply its deficiencies, but they were still extraordinarily ignorant. Some unaccountably obscure factor of her illness came into play with her, and she became listless and sank and died very quickly. I do not know what remedial measures were attempted. I hardly knew what was happening until the whole thing was over.

At that time my attention was much engrossed by the stir of the great Befana festival that was held on May Day in the Year of Scaffolding. It was the first of the ten great public meetings that opened the new age. Young people nowadays can scarcely hope to imagine the enormous quantities of pure litter and useless necessaries with which we had to deal. Had we not set aside a special day and season, the whole world would have been an incessant reek of small

flame, and it was, I think, a happy idea to seize this ancient festival of the May and November fires. It was inevitable that the old idea of purification should merge with the new; it was felt to be a burning of other than material incumbrances. Innumerable quasi-spiritual things—deeds, documents, debts, vindictive records—went up on these great flames. People passed praying between the fires, and it was a fine symbol of the new and wider tolerance that had come to men, that those who still found their comfort in the orthodox faith came bitter unprepared to pay that all hate might be burned out of their professions. For even in the time of Paul, now that men have done with base hatred, one may find the living God.

Excellent were the things we had to destroy in these great purges. First, there were nearly all the houses and buildings of the old time. In the end we did not save in England one building in five thousand that was standing when the comet came. Year by year, as we made our houses afresh in accordance with the newer needs of our new social functions, we swept away more and more of these humble structures, the ancient residential houses—huts, built, with out imagination, without beauty, without common beauty, without even comfort or

TO HIGHLIGHT THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE BATTLE, THE ARTISTS HAVE USED A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT TECHNIQUES. THE BATTLE



convenience—in which the early twentieth century had been sheltered. We saved nothing but what was beautiful or interesting out of all their grand and melancholy abundance. The actual houses, of course, we could not drag to our fires, but we brought all their shifting deal doors, their dreadful window sashes, their wavy-knocking staircases, their dark, dark cupboards, the vermilion papers from their ugly walls, their dust- and dirt-sodden carpets, their ill-designed and yet pretentious tables and chairs, sideboards and chest drawers, the old shirt-saturated books, their smut—*their* dirty, decayed, and altogether painful ornaments, amidst which I remember there were sometimes even staled dead birds!—we burned them all. The paint-peeled woodwork, with coat above coat of nasty paint—that in particular blazed freely. I have already tried to give you an impression of old-world furniture, of Purdon's bedroom, my mother's room, Mr. Gubbins' sitting-room, but, thank Heaven! there is nothing in life now to convey the peculiar dinginess of it all. For one thing, there is no more imperfect combination of coal going on everywhere, and so readings like grasses, open scums along the earth from which that grows out perpetually. We burned and destroyed most of our private buildings and all the woodwork, all our furniture—*except* a few score thousand pieces of distinct and intrinsic beauty, from which our present forms have developed—nearly all our hangings and carpets, and also we destroyed almost every scrap of old-world clothing. Only a few carefully dissevered types and vestiges of that remain now in our museums.

One writes now with a peculiar horror of the dust of the old world. The men's clothes were worn without any cleansing process at all, except an occasional superficial brushing, for periods of a year or so; they were made of dark, obscurely named patterns to conceal the stage of delinquency they had reached, and they were of a linked and porous texture admirably calculated to accumulate dirtling matter. Many women wore skeins of similar substances, and of no long and inconveniences a form that they inevitably trailed among all the shenanigans of our horse-frequent roads. It was not boast in England that the whole of our population was sooted—their feet were for

the most part ugly enough to need to—but it becomes now inconceivable how they could have unperceived their dirt in the smutting cases of leather and imitation of leather they used! I have heard it said that a large part of the physical decline that was apparent in our people during the closing years of the nineteenth century, though no doubt due in part to the miscellanies, *hors d'oeuvre* of the food they ate, was in the main attributable to the idleness of the common footweare. They shirked open-air exercise altogether, because their boots were not nimously and plashed and bent them if they took it. I have mentioned, I think, the part my own boots played in the squalid drama of my adolescence. I had a sense of untidy triumph over a fallen enemy when at last I found myself steering truck after truck of cheap boots and shoes (second stock from Swindles) to the run-off by the top of the Glencoe blue furnaces.

Most of our public buildings we destroyed and burned as we reshaped our plan of habitation. Our theater-sheds, our banks and inconvenient business premises, our factories (these in the first year of all), and all the "unceasing repetition" of silly little sham Gothic churches and meetinghouses, mass-looking sheds of stone and mortar without fire, invention, or any beauty at all in them, that men had thrust into the face of their created God, even as they thrust cheap food into the mouths of their created workers—all these we also swept away in the course of that first decade. Then we had the whole of the suspended steam-railway system to scrap and get rid of, platforms, signals, fences, rolling-stock—a plant of ill-planned, snake-distributing nuisance apparatus that would, under former conditions, have maintained an offensive, distasteful, obtrusive life for perhaps half a century. Then also there was a great harvest of houses, notice boards, headboards, ugly sheds. All the corrugated iron in the world and everything that was covered with tar, our gas works and petroleum stores, our horse vehicles and carts and lorries—all had to be eradicated. But I have said enough now perhaps to give some idea of the bulk and quality of our great bonfire, our burnings up, our meltings down, our toll of sheer wreckage, over and above the constructive effort, in these early years.

(To be concluded.)

In the Days of the Comet

By H. G. WELLS

Illustrated by Harry Foster

BOOK THE THIRD—THE NEW WORLD

CHAPTER THE THREE—BIZARRE AND NEW YEAR'S EVE—DISASTERS

SUMMER. The previous instalments deal with happenings in England just before the Great Change, when a huge comet is threatening to come in contact with the earth. In addition to hard times and general disarray with existing world conditions, England has gone to war with Germany. The author, William Langford, has become a popular though, the subject of, his local farce. This story leads to the breaking of Langford's engagement to Alice Scott. The young man and his sweetheart girl, and when she comes with Edward Verrall, the son of her father's employer, he follows her despite a report on the last comet. Here he attempts to tell the truth with his friends. But the days go wild, and one day the earth, passing over the comet's path, is enveloped in a gas which renders every living being unconscious. This state lasts a few hours. Humanity then awakes in a changed world. Men find that they have new ways, new understandings, new desires. They begin to reconstruct the world in a fashion dictated by the principles of human brotherhood. Langford sees that he must give himself up to Verrall, and does so. In response to his home in England and that in his mother in Iseling Heath, Alice Reeves comes to take care of her, and the young man finds himself much attracted to the girl. Meanwhile the regeneration of the world goes steadily on. People are received that everything that is ugly or useless disappears. Great antique buildings disappear—gigantic structures of art. These buildings are absorbed as leathes. In the huge bonfires are consumed all crooked and squatuary houses, hangings, carpets, and clothing. Everything that tends to mar the beauty of nature is destroyed as well.

II

BUT there were but the coarse material bases of the planet's fire of the world. These were but the outward and visible signs of the incalculable changes, rights, admissions, debts, bills, checks, and characters that were cast upon the fire, a vast accumulation of energies and uniform within corners enough nor beautiful enough to preserve, wet to weigh the blare, and oil (having a few truly glorious prophetic and momentous) of our symbols, our apparatus and material of war. Their comprobable triumphs of our old, harsh, half-commercial fire acts were presently condemned, great oil paintings, due to please the half-educated middle class, glazed for a moment and were gone. Arcadian marble crumpled to avoid fire, a gross multitude of oily substances and decorative mockery, and hangings, and embroideries, and bad music and musical instruments, shared the fate. And books, crowded books, and tales of

newspapers went also to these pyres. From the private houses in Southwark alone—which I had cleared, perhaps not entirely, altogether otherwise—we gathered a whole dust-cart full of cheap ill-printed editions of the minor English classics—for the most part very dull stuff indeed and still drier—and about a bush-barrel of burlesqued and dog-eared penny fiction, base, native stuff, the slop of our nation's mind. And it seemed to me that when we gathered these books and papers together we gathered together something more than pens and paper; we gathered sniped and crippled after- and catalogue-hunting suggestions, the formulas of dull tolerances and stupid impunities, the mass delusive lassitudes of sluggish habits of thinking and timid and indecent evasions. There was more than a touch of malignant satisfaction for me in helping gather it all together.

I was wobsey, I say, with my share of the daybreak's work that I did not notice, as I should otherwise have done, the first indications of change in my mother's state. Indeed I thought her a little stronger; she was slightly flushed, slightly more talkative

On Belgrave Eve, our Leweseter carriage being finished, I went along the valley to the far end of Southwicks to help sort the shallop of the detached group of pictures there—their chief export had been musical instruments in imitation of marble, and there was very little sorting, I found, to be done—and there it was Anna found me at last by telephone, and told me my mother had died in the morning suddenly and very shortly after my departure.

For a while I did not seem to believe it; this obviously lamentable event stunned me when it came as though I had never had an anticipatory moment. For a while I went on working, and then almost apathetically, in a mood of half-reckless cynicism, I started for Leweseter.

When I got there the last offices were over, and I was about my old mother's powdered white hair, very still, but a little cold and stern to me, a little melancholy, lying among white flowers.

I went on alone to her, into that quiet room, and stood for a long time by her bedside. I sat down then and thought. Then at last, strongly hunched, and with the depths of my loneliness opening beneath me, I came out of that room and down into the world again, a bright-eyed, active world, very noisy, happy, and busy with its last preparations for the mighty creation of past and superseded things.

III

I remember that first Belgrave lasted as the most terribly lonely night in my life. It stands in my mind in fragments, fragments of intense feeling with forgotten gaps between.

I recall very distinctly lying upon the great staircase of Leweseter House (though I don't remember getting there from the room in which my mother lay), and how upon the landing I met Anna ascending as I came down. She had but just heard of my return, and she was hurrying upstairs to me. She stopped and so did I, and we stood and clasped hands, and she whitened my face as the way women sometimes do. So we remained for a second or so. I could say nothing to her at all, but I could feel the warmth of her emotion. I faltered, answered the intense pressure of her hand, rechristened it, and after a quiet second of hesitation went on down, returning to my own

presuppositions. It did not occur to me at all then to ask myself what she might be thinking or feeling.

I remember the queer full of colour evening light, and how I went mechanically some paces toward the dining-room. Then at the sight of the little tables, and a gusty outburst of talking voices, as some one in front of me rang the door-bell and so, I remembered that I did not want to eat. After that comes an impression of myself walking across the open grass in front of the house, and the purpose I had of getting alone upon the moon, and how somehow passing me said something about a hat. I had come out without my hat.

A fragment of thought has linked itself with an effect of long shadows upon turf golden with the light of the setting sun. The world was singularly empty, I thought, without either Nellie or my mother. There wasn't any sense in it any more. Nellie was already back in my mind then. Then I am out on the moon. I crossed the lawn where the boundaries were being piled, and sought the lonely places.

I remember very clearly sitting near a gate beyond the park, in a fold just below the crest that led the Beacon Hill boundary and its crowd, and I was looking at and admiring the sunset. The golden earth and sky seemed like a little bubble that floated in the glow of human beauty. Then in the twilight I walked along an unknown, haunted road between high hedges.

I did not sleep under a roof that night; but I bargained and ate. I ate over midnight at a little inn over toward Beccles-hill, and rode away from my home. Invariably I had avoided the cross-roads where the hawker crowds gathered, but here there were many people, and I had to share a table with a man who had some useless mortgage deeds to burn. I talked to him about them—but my soul stood at a great distance behind my lips.

Soon such Bishop hone a little tulip-shaped flame-flower. Little black figures clustered round and dotted the base of its petals, and as for the rest of the mulberries ahead, the kindly night whitened them up. By leaving the roads and clear paths and wandering in the fields I continued to keep alone, though the confused noise of voices and the roaring and crackling of great fires was always near me.

I wandered into a lonely meadow, and



she stepped out of the dream i had made of her. a town of blues and
silents and human kind trees

presently, in a hollow of deep shadow, I lay down to sleep at the stars. I lay hidden in the darkness, and over and upon the weight and sprawl of the Balkan fires that were burning up the torn bodies of a vanquished age, and the shouting of the people passing through the fires and praying to be delivered from the prison of themselves, reached my ears. And I thought of my mother, and then of my new loneliness and the hunger of my heart for Nettie.

I thought of many things that night, but chiefly of the overwhelming personal love and tenderness that had come to me in the wake of the Change, of the greater need, the unsatisfied need in which I stood, for the one person who could fulfill all my desires. So long as my mother had lived she had in a constant hold my heart, given me a flood these emotions could live upon, and suffused them with an atmosphere of spirit, but now suddenly that one possible comfort had left me. There had been many at the season of the Change who had thought that this great enlargement of mankind would abolish personal love; but it had only made it finer, fuller, more vividly necessary. They had thought that since men now were all full of the joyful passion to make and do, and glad and loving and of willing service to all their fellows, there would be no need of the too intimate trusting communion that had been the finest thing of the former life. And indeed, so far as this was a matter of advantage to the struggle for existence, they were right. But so far as it was a matter of the spirit and the fine perceptions of life, it was altogether wrong.

We had indeed not eliminated personal love, we had but stripped it of its base wrappings, of its pride, its suspicion, its narrative and competitive elements, until at last it stood up in our minds stark, shining, and invincible. Through all the fine, glorifying ways of the new life there were for everyone certain persons, mysteriously and indescribably in the key of oneself, whose presence gave pleasure, whose mere existence was theorist, whose idealism blended with actual to make a complete and predominant harmony for their predetermined loves. They were the essential thing in life. Without them the fine brave show of the rejuvenated world was a cigar-burned stick without a rider, a bowl without a flower, a theater without a play. And to me that night of Balkans it was as clear as

white flames that Nettie, and Nettie alone, roared those harmonies in me. And she had gone! I had sent her from me; I knew not whether she had gone. That is my first venture foolishness-cut her out of my life forever.

So I saw it then, and I lay unseen in the darkness and called upon Nettie, and wept for her, lay upon my face and wept for her, while the glad people went to and fro, and the music strained thick across the distant stars, and the red reflections, the shadows, and the fluctuating glows, danced over the trees of the world.

Not the Change had freed us from our lesser passions indeed, from habitual and mechanical concupiscence and mean mirth and coarse laughings, but from the passions of love it had not freed us. It had but brought Eros, the lord of life, to his own. All through the long sorrow of that night I, who had rejected him, confessed his sway, with tears and inexpressible regret.

I cannot give the remoted parts of when I awoke up, nor of my tumultuous wanderings in the valleys between the midnight fires, nor how I started the laughing and rejoicing multitude who went strumming home between three and four, to resume their lives, swept and garnished, stripped and clean. But at dawn, when the atoms of the world's gladness were ceasing to glow—it was a blank dawn that made me shiver in my thin summer clothes—I came across a field to a little cage full of drowsy hyacinths. A queer sense of familiarity arrested my steps, and I stood puzzled. Then I moved to step a dozen paces from the path, and at once a singularly misshapen tree hatched itself in a notch in my memory. This was the place! Here I had stood, there I had placed my old hat, and shot with my revolver, leaning to use it against the day when I should encounter Verrall.

Kate and no other had gone now, and all my hat and narrow past, its last stages had shrivelled and snuffed in the whirling gusts of the Balkan fires. So I walked through a world of grey ashes at last, back to the great house in which the dead, deformed image of my dear lost mother lay.

IV

I came back to Lowchester House very tired, very wretched, and exhausted by my fruitless longing for Nettie. I had no thoughts of what lay before me.



THE SPLASHED NEARLY PROSPECT OF THAT BRAHMIN-CITY WAS BEFORE ME. THREE.
FOR ONE CLEAR MOMENT I SAW IN ITS GALLERIES AND SPACES, IN THOSE
OF GOLDEN FLEET AND CRYSTAL WATER.

A miserable attraction drew me into the great house to look again on the atmosphere that had been my mother's face, and as I came into that room, Anna, who had been sitting by the open window, rose to meet me. She had the air of one who waits. She, too, was pale with watching; all night she had watched between the dead white and the Bellane fire abroad, and longed for my coming. I stood mute between her and the bedside.

"Wilkie," she whispered, and eyes and body seemed incandescent pity.

An unseen presence drew us together. My mother's fire became resolute, commanding. I turned to Anna as a child might turn to its nurse. I put my hands about her strong shoulders, she looked me to her, and my heart gave way. I buried my face in her breast and clung to her weakly, and burst into a passion of weeping.

She held me with hungry arms. She whispered to me, "There, there!" as one whispers comfort to a child. Suddenly she was kissing me. She kissed me with a hungry intensity of passion, on my cheeks, on my lips. She kissed me on my lips with lips that were salt with tears. And I returned her kisses.

Then abruptly we desisted and stood apart—looking at each other.

V

It seems to me as if the intense memory of Netta satisfied entirely out of my mind at the touch of Anna's lips. I loved Anna.

We went to the council of our family—common it was then called—and she was given me in marriage, and within a year she had borne me a son. We were much of each other, and talked ourselves very close together. My faithful friend she became and has been always, and for a time we were passionate lovers. Always she had loved me and kept my soul full of tender gratitude and love for her, always when we met our hands and eyes gave friendly greeting, all through our lives from that hour we have been each other's surest help and refuge, each other's unquenching founts of help and sweetly frank and open speech. And after a while my love and desire for Netta returned as though it had never faded away.

No one will have difficulty now in understanding how that could be, but in the end

days of the world-masters that would have been held to be the most impossible thing I should have had to crush that sacred love out of my thoughts, to have kept it secret from Anna, to have lied about it to all the world. The old-world theory was, there was only one love—we who lived upon a sea of love had that hard to understand. The whole nature of a man was supposed to go out to the one girl or woman who possessed him, her whole nature to go out to him. Nothing was left over—it was a despicable thing to have any overplus at all. They formed a most wicked system of two—two and such children as she bore him. All other women he was held bound to find no beauty in, no sweetness, no interest, and the likewise, all other men. The old-time man and woman went apart in couples, into desolate little houses, like huts in little pits, and in these "huts" they sat down purposing to love, but really nothing very soon to justify watching of this extravagant mutual proprietorship. All freshness passed very speedily out of their love, out of their conversation, all pride out of their common life. To persons such other freedom was black darkness. That I and Anna should live, and after our love-journey together go about our separate business that at the public tables until the advent of her motherhood, would have seemed a terrible strain upon our loyalty. And that I should have it in me to go on loving Netta—who loved in different measure both Verrell and me—would have outraged the very quietude of the old convention.

In the old days love was a cruel, propitiatory thing. But now Anna could let Netta live in the world of my mind as freely as a son will suffer the presence of what likes. If I could hear notes that were not in her compass she was glad, because she loved me, that I should listen to other music than hers. And she, too, could see the beauty of Netta. Life is an rich and generous soul, giving friendship and a thousand tender interests and helps and comforts, that no one thinks another of the full realizations of all possibilities of beauty. For me from the beginning Netta was the figure of beauty, the shape and color of the divine principle that lights the world. For everyone there are certain types, certain faces and forms, gestures, voices, and intonations that have that inexplicable, unanalyzable quality. These came through the crowd of kindly,

friendly fellow-men and women—one's own. These touch one mysteriously, stir depths that most otherwise drowse, pierce and interpret the world. To refuse this interpretation is to refuse the sun, to darken and deaden all life. I loved Nettle, I loved all who were like her, in the measure that they were like her, in voice, or eyes, or form, or smile. And between my wife and me there was no bitterness that the great goddess, the life-given, Aphrodite, Queen of the Living Dead, came to my imagination so. It qualified our mutual love not at all, since here in our changed world love is unaffected; it is a golden net about our globe that nets all humanly together.

I thought of Nettle much, and always most lovelily beautiful things restored me to her, all like music, all pure deep color, all tender and solemn things. The stars were hers, and the mystery of moonlight; the sun she wore in her hair, powdered finely, beaten into gleams and threads of sunlight in the wisps and strands of her hair. Then suddenly one day a letter came to me from her, in her unaltered clear handwriting, but in a new language of expression, telling necessary things. She had learned of my mother's death, and the thought of me had grown so strong as to pierce the silence I had imposed on her. We wrote to each of her—like common friends with a certain constraint between us at first, and with a great longing to see her

once more ardent in my heart. For a time I felt that hunger unexpressed, and then I was moved to tell it to her. And so on New Year's Day in the Year Four, she came to Leweschester and me. How I remember that coming, across the gulf of fifty years! I went out across the park to meet her, so that we should meet alone. The winter-morning was very clear and cold, the ground now carpeted with snow, and all the trees a motionless lace and glister of frosty crystals. The rising sun had touched the white with a speck of gold, and my heart beat and sang within me. I remember now the snowy shoulder of the dove, white against the bright sky. And presently I saw the woman I loved coming through the white still trees.

I had made a goddess of Nettle, and behold she was a fellow-creature! She came, sun-wrapped and tremulous, to me, with the tender promise of tears in her eyes, with her hands outstretched and that dear smile quivering upon her lips. She stepped out of the dress I had made of her, a thing of needs and regrets and human infirmities. Her hands as I took them were a little cold. The golden shone through her indeed, glowed in all her body, she was a wondrous temple of love for me, but I could feel like a thing now discovered, the terrors and shames of her living, her dear personal and mortal, hands.

EPILOGUE

THE WINDOW OR THE TOWER

This was as much as this pleasant-looking, gray-bearded man had written. I had been lost in his story throughout the earlier portion of it, forgetful of the writer and his gracious room, and the high tower in which he was sitting. But gradually, as I drew near the end, the sense of strangeness returned to me. It was more and more evident to me that this was a different humanity from any I had known, usual, having different customs, different beliefs, different interpretations, different emotions. It was no mere change in conditions and institutions the comet had wrought. It had made a change of heart and mind. In a manner it had dismagnetized the world, robbed it of its spirit, its little intense jealousies, its inconsistencies, its humor. At the end, and particularly after the death of his mother, I felt his story had slipped away from my sympathies altogether. Those Balkans from bed buried something in him that would live still and unobtruded in me, that rebelled in particular at that return of Nettle. I became a little insatiable. I no longer ate with him, nor gathered a sense of complete understanding from his phrases. His Lord Biro indeed! He and these transfigured people—they were beautiful and noble people, like the people one sees in great pictures, like the gods of noble sculpture, but they had no nearer fellowship than those to men. As the change was realized, with every stage of realization the gulf widened and it was harder to follow his words.

I put down the last fascicle of all, and met his friendly eyes. It was hard to dislike him.

I felt a subtle embarrassment in putting the question that perplexed me. And yet it seemed so natural to me I had to put it. "And did you—?" I asked. "Were you—lovers?"

His eyebrows rose. "Of course."

"But your wife—?"

It was evident he did not understand me.

I hesitated still more. I was perplexed by a conviction of baseness. "But—?" I began. "You remained lovers?"

"Yes." I had grave doubts if I understood him, or he me.

I made a still more courageous attempt. "And had Nellie no other lovers?"

"A beautiful woman like that! I know not how many loved beauty in her, nor what she found in others. But we four from that time were very close; you understand, we were friends, helpers, personal known in a world of known."

"Four?"

"There was Vernall."

Then suddenly it came to me that the thoughts that stirred in my mind were sinister and base, that the queer suspicions, the coquettish and coarse jealousies of my old world were over and done for these more finely living souls. "You made," I said, trying to be liberal minded, "a home together."

"A home?" He looked at me, and, I know not why, I glanced down at my feet. What a change, ill-made thing a home is, and how hard and coldness oppresses my clothing! How harshly I stood out amidst these fine, perfected things. I had a moment of rebellious detonation. I wanted to get out of all this. After all, it wasn't my style. I wanted immensely to say something that would bring him down a peg, make sure, as it were, of my suspicion by launching an offensive accusation. I looked up and he was standing.

"I forgot," he said. "You are pretending the old world is still going on. A home?"

He put out his hand, and quite suddenly the great window whitened down to me, and the splendid exterior prospect of that desecrated city was before me. There for one clear moment I saw it, its galleries and open spaces, its trees of golden fruit and crystal water, its music and rejoicing, love and beauty without causing flowing through its varied and intersecting streets. And the nearer people I saw more directly and plainly, and no longer in the distorting mirror that hung overhead. They really did not justify my suspicions, and yet—! They were such people as one sees on earth save that they were cheered. How can I express that change? As a woman is changed in the eyes of her lover, so a woman is changed by the loss of a lover, they were exalted.

I stood up beside him and looked out. I was a little flushed, my ears a little reddened, by the inconveniences of my curiosities, and by my uneasy sense of profound moral differences. He was taller than I.

"This is our home," he said, smiling, and with thoughtful eyes on me.

(The End.)

Who Knows?

By COSMOPOLITAN MAGAZINE

These cryptic riddles upon the broken wits think,
Who will interpret? or that none ditch
The cricket fills the night with, who is wise
To give it words? And when the night-wind flings,
Who has the delicate ear that can divine
The soughings of the ever-whispering pine?
Or can declare the news the white sides bring,
When shown send out their ancient summing?